9526

Advanced Dungeons & Dragons®

Ravenloft®

Game Adventure

Death Ascendant

TSR

Map 1: Falkovnia / Darkon Border

Shadow Rift
City
Road
Bridge
River
Lake
Domain Border
Romenza Camp
Abandoned Raft
Milhausen Cottage
Woods
25 miles

LAMORDIA
DARKON
DEMENTLIEU
FALKOVNIA
Vuchar River
Nartok
Neufurchtenburg
Musarde River
Lekar
Zapadnost River
Morfenzi
N

Death Ascendant

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9526

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Introduction

The glories of our blood and state
Are shadows, not substantial things
There is no armor against fate
Death lays his icy hand on kings
Sceptre and crown
Must tumble down

J. Shirley

There are many different ways to cheat death. Magical potions that prolong life, spells that reincarnate or resurrect the dead, and artifacts that can protect a body indefinitely from the ravages of natural decay, all are well known to those who follow the adventurer's path. At times, the gods themselves may even intervene, sparing the life of a loyal and worthy servant and temporarily holding death at bay.

But there are also other, darker paths that one might trod in an effort to avoid the clutches of the grim reaper. Supping on the tainted blood of a vampire, working the strange and arcane magics that lead to lichdom, or accepting a boon from an evil god with a midnight heart all can convey immortality, albeit immortality with a terrible price.

What becomes of those who follow these foul and dangerous paths? Have they truly and forever escaped the chill of the grave, or have they unwittingly signed a pact with Death that merely grants them a temporary reprieve from his clutches? Only the all-seeing fates know the truth, a truth that is spoken in a whisper that few can hear or are willing to heed.

For the Dungeon Master

Death Ascendant is designed for a group of three to six characters of levels 6–8. It is designed to be played as a stand alone adventure, but it also continues the adventure started in *Death Unchained*. Because there is so much background material here detailing the events in *Death Unchained*, the Dungeon Master (DM) is encouraged to read this adventure thoroughly before running it.

The Player Characters (PCs) will be pitted against a number of undead creatures, so it would be helpful to have a priest in the party. The spells *atonement*, *cure disease*, and *remove curse* will also come in handy, since the heroes stand a good chance of being infected with lycanthropy.

The adventure is set in Falkovnia and Darkon, two of the core domains of the RAVENLOFT® world. It pits the PC heroes against the Kargat, a secret police force loyal to the lord of Darkon, and their leader Lowellyn Dachine, himself a minion of this darklord.

Although it is not required for this adventure, the DM may find the sourcebook *Van Richten's Guide to the Lich* helpful as it provides background information on the process commonly used to undertake the transformation into a lich. *Van Richten's Guide to Werebeasts*, which provides additional information on running lycanthrope nonplayer characters (NPCs) and on the affliction of lycanthropy, may also be helpful.

In addition, *The Complete Priest's Handbook* rules supplement has a useful section on the god of death, while *Monster Mythology* contains background material on two of the deities whose priests appear in this adventure. *The Waking Dream*, found in the *Forbidden Lore* boxed set, has useful tips for handling fortune telling using the Vistani tarokka deck. (This information can also be found in the second edition of the RAVENLOFT boxed set.)

Introduction

Adventure Summary

The heroes are contacted by a young Vistana whose family has been killed by thieves (members of the Ebon Fold who were fleeing from the defeat of their secret society, a result of the events in the adventure, *Death Unchained*). The trail of the killers leads to the city of Nartok in the domain of Darkon. Along the way, the heroes encounter a new type of zombie, a wolfwere who is masquerading as a human child, and discover that one of the Ebon Fold members whom they have been following is dead.

In Nartok, members of the Kargat (Darkon's secret police force) have taken over a temple sacred to the Eternal Order (Darkon's state religion). In the temple, their leader, Lowellyn Dachine, has constructed a device, known as the *infernal machine*, that can transform whomever is laid inside it into a powerful, lich-like creature. The life force needed to power this device has been stolen by the Kargat using magical daggers known as *blood blades*. It is stored in crystal skulls inside the temple, and from there will be channelled into a golden coffin at the heart of the religious complex.

The heroes can learn, with relative ease, that the "thieves" they are pursuing have taken refuge inside the temple. Through careful observation, they can uncover the link between the thieves and the Kargat, and can learn about the rivalries that exist between the secret police (most of whom are lycanthropes) and the priesthood whose temple they have taken over. Ultimately, they can learn about the *infernal machine* and its components, and can throw a wrench into Lowellyn's plans.

Despite this partial victory, Lowellyn (or another character) does undergo a transformation, not into a true lich, but into a powerful creature that is every bit as dangerous. To defeat this creature, known only as "Death," the heroes must discover its secret weakness (any of the symbols associated with birth) and use these to drive it away.

Fear and Horror Checks

At several points during this adventure, the Dungeon Master is instructed to have the players make fear and horror checks. This game mechanic is intended to foster appropriate reactions, on the part of the characters, to a horrific or terrifying situation.

At the DM's discretion, fear and horror checks may be omitted if the players are already doing an adequate job of role-playing these emotions.

Running This Adventure

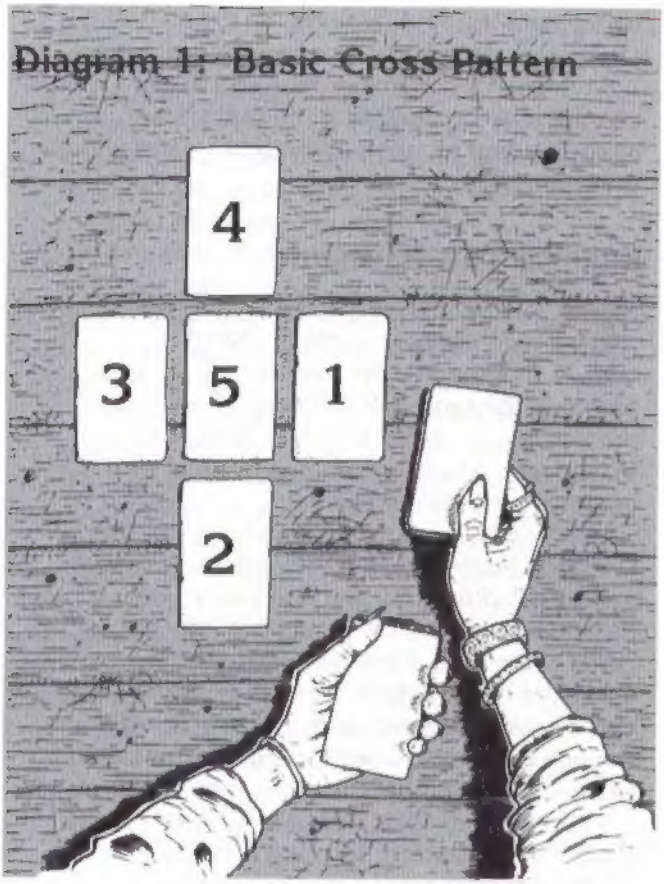
Death Ascendant uses fortune telling to give the heroes clues and to foreshadow the events that are to unfold in the temple in Nartok. These prophecies are offered by Vito Romenza, a Vistani seer whom the heroes meet at the beginning of this adventure.

Vito tells fortunes using tarokka cards. If the Dungeon Master has a torokka deck, provided in the *Forbidden Lore* and RAVENLOFT *2nd Edition* boxed sets, he should use only the 14 cards of the high deck. If the DM does not have a tarokka deck, a deck of regular playing cards can be used. Use the cards of one suit, ace through ten, Jack, Queen, King, plus one Joker to represent the 14 cards of the high deck.

Vito lays the cards out in a variation of the Basic Cross pattern, forming a cross by laying out four cards in an open circle, corners touching, with a fifth card in the center completing the cross (see Diagram 1). For the purposes of this adventure, it is only the card in the middle that determines the clue to be given, and thus this card should be laid with the greatest flourish. The other cards are ignored – although the Dungeon Master is encouraged to make ad-libbed references to them, commenting on how these other cards "influence" the meaning of the central card.

Each time Vito consults the tarokka, a single clue is given to the heroes; the Dungeon Master should read the verse associated with the fifth (central) card. At first, the DM will probably have to initiate these fortune tellings by having Vito offer to do a reading for the heroes. Eventually, however, the heroes will come to realize that valuable clues can be gained in this manner, and may start demanding that Vito continually consult the tarokka deck.

To ensure that this source of information is not abused, limitations have been placed on Vito's fortune telling abilities. After telling a fortune, Vito must refrain from consulting the tarokka until he feels "rested" again (this



requires 1d4 hours of rest). If he tries to tell a fortune before this time has elapsed, he must make a saving throw vs. paralyzation. If the roll succeeds, a second fortune can be told. If the roll fails, Vito lapses into a deep sleep (usually in the middle of telling the fortune) from which he will not awaken for 1d4 hours. When he awakens he is completely rested and may attempt a fortune telling again without penalty.

The Dungeon Master should note that use of the Tarokka deck does not change the outcome of the adventure. The fortune tellings are not the only source of information available to the heroes. Each of the clues which can be gotten from the cards can also be found somewhere else in the adventure, either in the form of a piece of physical evidence that the heroes can examine or as information that can be gleaned from a nonplayer character.

Tarokka Meanings

The Darklord (King)
"When mist and bone unite in life, upon the world shall fall much strife."

The Temptress (Queen)
"Heed not the call of the box of gold, or you will die before you're old."

The Marionette (Jack)
"The pierced ones who have risen again, are merely the pawns of more powerful men."

The Artifact (Ten)
"The crystal blades shall cause much strife: to the living, death; and from blood, unlife."

The Horseman (Nine)
"Beware the view unto the east, for it shall hold both man and beast."

The Innocent (Eight)
"When Death at last reveals its face, a child shall lead the way to grace."

The Mists (Seven)
"In Nartok, a great evil done, heralds the coming of a greater one."

The Donjon (Six)
"When the Mists are at the temple door, they shall hold the living forevermore."

The Hangman (Five)
"Those who try to steal Death's due shall have cause this act to rue."

The Ghost (Four)
"Did you heed my ghostly call? Your greed shall cast a deadly pall."

The Broken One (Three)
"Beside a tiny, golden light, a mind shall flee into the night."

The Raven (Two)
"A frowning face that does not speak: this is the source of what you seek."

The Beast (Ace)
"Beware the friend who is marked by teeth; blood shall reveal what lies beneath."

The Esper (Joker)
"Believe the heart and not the eyes; tiny foes wear a friendly guise."

Lycanthropy

Death Ascendant pits the heroes against mid-level operatives of the Kargat, four of whom are lycanthropes. Since the heroes are likely to enter into combat with these NPCs and become wounded by them, a brief summary of the lycanthropy affliction is in order.

During any battle with a lycanthrope, the Dungeon Master should take note of how many points of damage each of the heroes suffers as a result of a direct attack by a lycanthrope using its teeth or claws (whether

it is in human or beast form). There is a 2% chance per point thus inflicted (rolled secretly by the DM) that the wounded character will contract lycanthropy.

This condition manifests itself whenever the afflicted character smells blood. (For example, during a battle in which blood is shed, or even during the gutting and cleaning of a game animal for the cooking pot.) As a general rule, the character must be within five feet of the blood to smell it, unless a lot of it is present or unless the smell of blood is specifically mentioned by the text of this adventure.

Whenever this olfactory trigger is present, a character who has contracted lycantropy undergoes a transformation into werebeast form. He is overwhelmed with an uncontrollable lust for fresh, bloody meat, and immediately tries to satiate it by hunting, killing, and eating a living creature. Until transforming back into his normal form, this character is run by the Dungeon Master.

Fortunately, as a temporary NPC, the character need not make a powers check for any atrocities that he commits. While in lycanthrope form, the hero's Strength and Dexterity temporarily increase to 19 (and he may have a better than normal chance of breaking any bonds or bending any bars that have been used as a means of confinement). The character's Armor Class, attacks, movement, immunities, and weaknesses are that of the type of lycanthrope that caused the infection. All class-related skills are temporarily forgotten.

The werebeast form is maintained until the required amount of raw flesh has been consumed, anywhere from two pounds for a small lycanthrope, such as a wererat, to 50 pounds for a large lycanthrope, such as a werebear. The character then blacks out upon transformation back into normal form. He remembers nothing of the events that occurred while in werebeast form, but has the horrible feeling that something dreadful has just happened. If the hero is covered in the blood of his prey, or "awakens" beside a carcass which has been terribly mauled, a horror check is in order.

Note: This blood does *not* trigger a second transformation.

Upon returning to his usual form, the afflicted character heals anywhere from 10% to 60% (1d6x10) of the wounds suffered since his transform into werebeast form.

Lycanthropy is not a true disease, and thus cannot be cured by a *cure disease* spell. Before a cure can even be attempted, the true lycanthrope that infected the hero (or that started the chain of infection) must first be sought out and killed.

The next step in the process is to wait until the infected character changes into werebeast form, then cast the spells *atonement*, *cure disease*, and *remove curse* on the character. The character can then attempt a single saving throw vs. death magic. A successful roll means that the affliction has been shaken off; the character immediately returns to his normal form. A failed roll means that the character is a lycanthrope for life and will periodically revert to a state in which he falls under the Dungeon Master's control.

Note: All of the werebeast NPCs encountered in *Death Ascendant* are true lycanthropes, and thus can not be cured in this manner.

Any heroes witnessing the transformtion of one of their companions into werebeast form must make a horror check. A fear check may also be required if the lycanthropic form is that of a large and powerful animal, such as a bear.

The Continuing Adventure

Death Ascendant is the second in a trilogy of adventures. It continues the story begun in *Death Unchained*, a 64-page module set in Falkovnia that pits the heroes against members of the Ebon Fold, a group of assassins who were unwittingly working to aid the plans of the Kargat. The saga will be concluded in *Requiem*, a boxed set that will expand upon the transformation undergone by Lowellyn Dachine in this adventure.

Despite the fact that it is part of a trilogy, *Death Ascendant* can be played as a stand-alone adventure. It has its own self-contained goals and villains.

When they have completed *Death Ascendant*, the heroes should feel that they have accomplished their goal by banishing Death into the Mists. That this is merely a prologue to an upcoming battle with a darklord and his minions should come as a complete surprise.

A Trail Of Blood

Adieu, farewell, earth's bliss,
This world uncertain is
Fond are life's lustful joys
Death proves them all but toys
None from his darts can fly
I am sick; I must die

Thomas Nash

This adventure begins outside the city of Stangengrad, in the domain of Falkovnia.

If the heroes have just experienced the events of *Death Unchained*, they should be headed for Stangengrad already. Any surviving members of the Ebon Fold (the secret society the heroes confronted in *Death Unchained*) fled in that direction at the end of the previous adventure, and the heroes are likely to be hot on their heels. Alternatively, the heroes may be travelling to Stangengrad to seek out a friend and ally, the wizard Mircea, who fled here with his students after the Talons raided his magic school in Lekar.

Unfortunately, the city is under martial law, due to the fact that a "spy" from a neighboring domain has recently been captured within its walls. The gates to the city have been temporarily closed, preventing the heroes from entering.

If the heroes are on the road to Stangengrad immediately following the events of *Death Unchained* or are already encamped outside the city's gates, the Dungeon Master should skip ahead to the section **Unwelcome Visitors**, on page 9.

If the Dungeon Master has inserted another adventure after *Death Unchained*, the heroes may be starting from another location in Ravenloft. In this case, begin with the section **In the Mists** (page 8), which will transport them to Stagengrad in the domain of Falkovnia.

If this adventure is being played on its own, or if the heroes managed to escape the Demiplane of Dread after the events of *Death Unchained*, begin with the section **A Bloodstained Invitation** below.

A Bloodstained Invitation

This section is intended to provide a jumping in point for the *Grim Harvest* series. It is intended to draw player character heroes who have not been through the events of *Death Unchained* (the first adventure in this series) into Ravenloft, as well as into the campaign's storyline. If the characters in your game have already been through *Death Unchained*, the DM should go straight to the section titled **Unwelcome Visitors**.

Death Ascendant should start with the heroes being well-rested and fully healed after their previous adventure. They should be in a city that they have visited before and in which they have at least a few allies and acquaintances. As they are walking down the streets, they come upon a nonplayer character (NPC) that they are friendly with. The character is laying in the gutter, covered in filth and blood, babbling incoherently to himself. (The better acquainted the heroes are with the NPC, the better; his fate is intended to be a motivating factor to get the heroes personally involved in *Death Ascendant*.)

Presumably, the heroes will try to speak to the NPC while, at the same time, trying to help him up off the ground. When he is on his feet, read the following text (changing the text as necessary to fit the particular NPC):

A Trail Of Blood

Your friend clutches the front of your shirt. His eyes shine brightly behind his grimy face. There is the tint of madness in them. His blood-stained lips twist as he breathes raggedly and whipers, "The dead. They're using the dead as the weapons of our destruction."

His filthy hand slips from your shirt, leaving a stain of grime and blood. He lets out a final, ragged sigh, and dies in your arms.

As the NPC dies, something small and silver drops out of his shirt to the street, landing with a delicate "tink." If the heroes pick it up, they find it is a medallion in the shape of a human skull covered with intricate symbols. The medalion is shiny and bright, despite the soiled state of the NPC.

The significance of this mediallion is not immediately known by the heroes, but a successful check against a bard's legend lore ability or a brief consulation with a sage (costing 2d4 gp) will reveal the item as a holy symbol of an obscure god named Nerull. In fact, in all of the campaign world, there are only three known temples devoted to this deity. One of them happens to be located on the edge of the town the heroes are currently in. Followers of Nerull are rumored to glorify death and suffering, and to routinely engage in ritual torture and mutilation.

Note: Nerull is a deity native to the WORLD OF GREYHAWK® setting. If the DM is running a campaign on Oerth, Nerull is worshipped widely in the Great Kingdom but rarely elsewhere. The temple in the city where the heroes are is an abberation.

The heroes should want to investigate this cult since it seems that it has some connection to the death of their acquaintance. They can easily find the cult's temple, which is known to be in an abandoned mansion outside of town. As they approach, it becomes clear that some manner of service is in progress; the sound of dirge-like chants can be heard faintly on the wind.

The mansion is guarded by a single sentry (1st-level fighter, 6 hp) who can easily be avoided or dispatched, depending on the mood of the heroes. They then move unopposed through the debris-scattered hallways and quickly reach the decaying grand ballroom that serves as the cult's main worshiping area. Here, a chilling sight greets them. Read the players the following:

You peer into what must once have been a splendid ballroom, but the frescoes have faded and the floor is scuffed and covered with debris. Further, it is clearly no longer a place of joyful recreation.

In the dim, flickering light of the four braziers that stand in the corners of the room, you see a figure in dark robes standing near the far wall. The figure holds a scythe in one skeletal hand, and its eyes are tiny green fires within in a skull that is covered with dark stains. Wisps of smoke and mist are constantly curling and shifting around the figure, at once partially obscuring him and defining where he can be found in the shadows.

Half a dozen or so individuals, each clad in robes similar to the ones worn by the skeleton, stand arrayed before him. They are performing the droning chant you could hear as you approached.

Each of these figures extends an arm above his head, clutching what appears to be a hollow crystal dagger. The chanting grows louder and tendrils of smoky mist seperate from the figure. These whisps grow more and more humanoid in shape as they drift toward the robed figures. As you watch they develop distinct countenances, each with features that are twisted in unbearable agony. As the whisps reach the chanting figures, writhing in silent torture, they are sucked into the daggers, causing the crystal blades to glow briefly. You feel you can almost hear their screams echo in your mind.

The skeletal figure is an avatar of Nerull. He is here to oversee a small portion of a far-reaching plot and is currently assisting the cultists in binding undead spirits (wraiths and spectres) into the daggers. He senses the heroes' presence immediately.

The skull shifts in the shadows of the hood, and you realize its green eyes are fixing on you.

"More spirits to feed the hunger of the *shards*," it hisses, pointing a boney finger at you.

The cultists whirl around, holding their daggers aloft. The blades glint a bloody red in the light from the guttering torches.

The number of cultists in the room is twice the size of the party. Each member of the party who is visible is attacked by two cultists.

Cultists, hm/f: AC 10; MV 12; F1; hp 7 each; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4+special (see *blood blades* on page 21); SZ M (6' long); ML fanatic (19); Int average (10); AL N; XP 65 each.

The cultists attack with the *blood blades* that were just created (these magical weapons do one point of damage and drain one level of live energy per successful attack, see page 21 for details) and use them to attack the heroes. Nonetheless, this combat should be over quickly, with the heroes being largely unharmed. However, as they fight, the whisps of mist around the skeletal figure expand and grow thicker. A dry, rasping chuckle issues from the creature as the last cultist falls (or when a hero moves to attack it). It speaks in a whisper that seems to reverbiate inside the very minds of the heroes:

"You fight valiantly and with passion. Thank you for coming to avenge your friend; the strength of your spirits had to be tested before I sent you on. You are now an intricate part of plans so large that you cannot hope to comprehend them, but strong blood like yours is needed to turn the wheels of progress. Rejoice that you have been given the honor to die in this cause."

Nerull's avatar keeps speaking even if the heroes attack him, ignoring their blows as the mist swirling around him continues to thicken.

The avatar has 90 hit points, is only harmed by +2 weapons or better, and has 100% magic resistance. The heroes can launch as many attacks as they are allowed in the round he is speaking but, immediately at the beginning of the following round, the mist around Nerull seems to expand to fill the room as in a silent explosion. The mist only appears to expand, however, because the heroes are, in fact, no longer in the ruined mansion on their home world. The avatar has used *plane shift* to move them to the Demiplane of Dread. They now find themselves in the Misty Border. (Nerull is a Greater Power and, as such, was able to force the heroes from the Prime Material with just a minor exertion of will.)

The heroes will likely assume that they have been subjected to a *fog cloud* spell, but that misperception will be dispatched when they try to find their way out of the spell's area of effect and realize the house they were in has vanished.

In the Mists

The Misty Border is one of the most nightmarish places in the AD&D® game multiverse, particularly for characters who have no idea where they are.

The DM should not conceal the fact that the heroes are no longer where they were (either elsewhere in Ravenloft or, if they are just entering the storyline, in the ruined mansion). However, as they attempt to get their bearings, the heroes are confronted by someone who appears to be the skeletal adversary from the house. In fact, they have encountered a Mist ferryman, one of the creatures native to the Misty Border.

A figure seperates from the shifting shadows. Hollow eye-sockets framed by white bone stare out at you from the folds of a dark hood.

"Trespassers," the figure says in a hollow, sinister voice. Then, it emits a strange, undulating cry that sounds vaguely like the sobbing of a frightened woman and moves to attack with taloned, boney hands!

The Mist ferryman's howl has summoned six others of his kind. As the heroes battle him, the DM should say that they can hear hollow voices moaning in the fog: "Trespassers . . . trespassers . . ." They reach the scene of the conflict in five rounds and, once they are within view, it is clear that they are identical to the skeletal monstrosity the heroes are already fighting.

Three of the summoned creatures attempt to surround and destroy a single hero (chosen randomly), while uttering the same sobbing cry with which the Mist ferryman got their attention. There are no more Mist ferrymen within range of the cry, but at this point the DM should call for a fear check by all the heroes, because of both the anticipation of more ferrymen being summoned and the chilling effect of the sound itself.

As the battle unfolds, the DM should make it clear that one hero is being singled out and surrounded. If any of the other heroes make a concerted effort to come to his friend's aid, the DM should make note of this. Likewise, if a hero who defeats any creatures attacking him does not assist this beleaguered comrade, the DM should make a note of that, too. Extreme heroism or extreme cowardice during this encounter will have an impact on one of the climactic scenes of this adventure.

Once all the Mist ferrymen have been defeated, the Mists start to dissapate and the heroes emerge in an unfamiliar countryside.

Unwelcome Visitors

Whether the heroes came here from Lekar (the city in which *Death Unchained* took place) or were transported by the Mists, they find themselves outside the city of Stangengrad. Refer to **Map 1: Falkovnia/Darkon Border** (found on the inside cover). Read the the following to the players:

> You stand on a wide paved road that leads to a walled city. Beyond the city lies a slow-moving river, its banks shrouded in clinging fog. A canal has been dug to form a moat that encircles the city. Water flows sluggishly through it, giving an odor of mud and decaying vegetation to the area. Three arched stone bridges with crumbling masonry cross this barrier.
>
> The city looks large enough to be home to a few thousand individuals. It is a grim looking place, with buildings of weather-stained stone. The city walls are studded with rusted blades and are

heavily patrolled; soldiers in black armor and capes can be seen moving along the battlements, their forms silhouetted against the murky gray clouds that fill the skies above.

Outside the city walls, near the bridges that span the moat, a number of wagons have been pulled off to the side of the road. Some are peasant carts, others are the ornate carriages of the wealthy. Soldiers move from one to the next, sometimes climbing aboard to peer at the occupants of a carriage or prod the contents of a wagon with their pikes. Occasionally someone is pulled roughly down from his conveyance by the soldiers and dragged away.

The gates of the city are firmly closed behind double portcullises. The soldiers patrolling in front of these gates are turning several of the wagons back along the road. It seems that the city has been closed to all outside traffic.

As you study the scene, you realize that all of the soldiers, and most of the people assembled outside the gates, have the image of a hawk branded on their foreheads.

Falkovnia is described in the RAVENLOFT campaign setting. The lord of the realm, Vlad Drakov, decreed decades ago that all children born in his realm must be branded with the mark of the hawk to show their alliegence to their land and lord. If the heroes should ask a native why he is branded thus, all they get is a scared look and the attention of the soldiers, something which is always unwanted in Falkovnia.

Due to its location near Falkovnia's border with Darkon, Stangengrad is heavily fortified. Of its 6,500 inhabitants, nearly 1,800 are soldiers, members of the army who are garrisoned here. These soldiers are fiercely loyal to the lord of Falkovnia, and are known as the Talons.

Stangengrad's fortifications are impressive. The city is surrounded by a 20-foot-tall stone wall whose outer surface is studded with razor-sharp blades. A moat directs water from the nearby river around the walls; the moat and river are rumored to be infested with monstrous fish that swallow men whole. The truth is that only the river contains these horrid creatures. Three stone bridges span the moat to the southwest of the city, but the gates they lead to are each blocked by double portcullises. Each gate (and the bridge that leads to it) is guarded by two squads of soldiers.

A wider bridge, on the city's northeast side, crosses the river itself. This gateway to the city is protected by four squads of soldiers. Beyond this bridge, on the other side of the river, is a road that leads into the neighboring domain of Darkon.

Spy Scare

Two days before the heroes' arrival at Stangengrad, the Talons discovered that a "spy ring" was operating inside the city. Although the sole spy to be captured revealed little about herself during her inquisition by the Talons, it was determined that she had come from the neighboring domain of Darkon, a domain that Falkovnia has gone to war with on no less than four separate occasions.

It was immediately assumed that the captured Darkonian agent had been sent by her masters to assess Stangengrad's fortifications. The woman was indeed an agent of the Kargat (Darkon's secret police), but her mission was not a military one. Rather, she was in Stangengrad to take delivery of a crystal skull that had been filled with stolen life energies by members of the Ebon Fold, a secret society of assassins in the city of Lekar. She was to have conveyed it back to her master in Darkon, an officer of the Kargat named Lowellyn Dachine.

The skull was never delivered; it was captured and/or destroyed during the events of *Death Unchained*, the adventure that preceded this one. Not aware of the calamity that had occurred, the Kargat agent tarried a little too long in Stangengrad, waiting in vain for the skull's delivery. She attracted the attention of the Talons and was subsequently captured, interrogated by torture, and executed by being impaled on a stake in a public square.

The soldiers in Stangengrad have been placed on alert as a result of the discovery of this Darkonian agent. They do not know the true mission of the captured spy, but they know that she was to meet other Darkonian

agents who were to arrive in Stangengrad in a few days' time. They believe that these agents may be carrying crystal-bladed daggers similar to the one found on the captured woman. Thus the soldiers are keeping a close watch in an effort to capture any other spies who try to sneak into the city. They harass any suspicious looking strangers they encounter and question them (under torture, if necessary) to determine if they are Darkonian agents.

If the heroes have arrived here from Lekar, they will be keen on entering the city, since they are hot on the heels of the cult they battled in the previous adventure. If they have emerged from the Mists at this spot, the city is an apparent source of information in a unfamiliar countryside.

Whether the heroes approach the gates or attract the attention of a squad of soldiers by questioning one of the natives (or simply by being the only group encountered by a patrol roaming the countryside), they will find that none of the Talons will answer their questions. In fact, the squad leader will order the heroes to be quiet, pointing out that they are already in violation of Falkovnian law. If the heroes have just arrived here, they are most likely carrying weapons, something which only Falkovnian soldiers may legally possess. If they have already spent enough time in the domain to know to hide their weapons, the squad leader accuses them of disturbing the peace, violating curfew, or some other trumped up charge. However, he adds, since the heroes are obviously foreigners, he will ignore their infraction if they cooperate with him and answer his questions swiftly and honestly.

The following list contains the basic questions the squad leader asks, as well as which answers will pacify (or anger) him and his men. The DM may have to improvise further questions and extrapolate reactions by the Falkovnians based on answers provided by the heroes.

- "Why have you come to Stangengrad? What is your business here?" (Any plausible answer will do.)
- "Have you come to Stangengrad to meet someone? What is that individual's name? Where and when were you to have met him?" (If the heroes try to lie by making up a contact person, they will be detained while a soldier is dispatched to check on the truth of the story. If they try to explain about persuing a murderous cult member, they will be detained and sent back to Lekar so they can provide a full testimony to the authorities of that city. A nonspecific answer that seems plausible in light of their first answer will not provoke a reaction.)
- "Are you carrying a dagger? Show it to me." (Displaying any crystal dagger or *blood blade* carried by the party will result in their detainment.)
- "Are you carrying any weapon with a crystal or glass blade? Show it to me." (Displaying any crystal or glass weapons carried by the party will result in their detainment.)
- "Where are you from? Are you a resident of Darkon?" (If the heroes claim to be residents of Darkon, they will be detained. Any other answer will not prevoke a negative reaction as none of the soldiers are very familiar with the lands outside Falkovnia.)

Should the Falkovnians decide to "detain" the heroes, the soldiers attempt to beat the heroes into unconsciousness. Their orders are to capture suspected spies and transport them to Lekar where Drakov can interrogate them personally. However, should the heroes prove to be too strong for the soldiers, the officer will blow a shrill whistle in the hopes of attracting another squad to the fracas (100% chance of one arriving in 1d4 rounds if near the city; 30% of one arriving in 1d10 rounds if in the countryside). He then wades into the fray, attacking with his sword.

If the heroes do not arouse the suspicion of the soldiers, the officer does nothing more than order them away from Stangengrad or eject them from the city, if they were apprehended while trying to sneak over the walls.

Whether the heroes are taken captive, escape the pursuing soldiers, or simply follow orders and leave the city, see **A Fellow Traveler**, page 13, to continue the adventure.

It is possible for the party can gain some information about the tight security measures around the city. If a successful reaction check is made for one of the officers toward an

inquisitive hero, the soldier may reveal any or all of the following facts:

- Two days ago, a Darkonian spy was captured inside Stangengrad.
- The spy was female and is believed to be a shapeshifter of some sort, since she was seen to sprout black feathers during an unsuccessful escape attempt.
- The spy was waiting to meet fellow Darkonian agents who were on their way to Stangengrad. The time and place of this meeting are unknown. No other Darkonian agents have been captured, thus far.
- The spy was carrying an unusual dagger with a crystal blade. It is believed that her fellow spies will be carrying similar daggers, and that she would recognize them by this trademark.

Talon Squad Leader, hm, F5: AC 5 (scale mail, shield); MV 11 (lightly encumbered); hp 35 each; THAC0 16 (14 with Strength bonus); #AT 1; Dmg 1d10 long sword); SD magic items; MR 5%; SZ M (5'8"–6'6"); ML elite (14); Int high (14); AL LE; XP 270.

The Talons, hm, F3 (squad of 8): AC 5 (scale mail, shield); MV 11 (lightly encumbered); hp 21 each; THAC0 16 (14 with Strength bonus); #AT 1; Dmg by weapon (1d6 short sword or 1d3 club); SZ M (5'8"–6'6"); ML elite (14); Int avg (10); AL LE; XP 65 each.

War Dog (1 per squad): AC 6; MV 12; HD 2+2; hp 9; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 2d4 (bite); SZ M (4' long); ML avg (10); Int semi-(4); AL N; XP 65.

The uniform of the Talons consists of black scale mail worn over a quilted doublet of blood-red velvet and black breeches. It also includes a black cape trimmed with red. The dog-handler hangs back during any encounters, ready to unleash a vicious, snarling wolfhound that is trained to tear a fleeing victim to shreds on the utterence of a one-word command.

The squad leaders are set apart from the other soldiers by the black iron bracers they wear. These bracers, embossed with the royal seal of their master (a falcon in flight), are secured on each wrist with a *wizard lock* spell. These bracers are magical, and act as *gloves of missile snaring.*

A Fellow Traveler

In this section, the heroes meet Vito, a young Vistana who needs someone to help his family. He is also a source of infomation and guidance for the heroes.

If the heroes were taken captive by the Falkovnians, they are loaded into a wagon that is little more than a cage on wheels. A handful of other other accused spies are already in the cart, and everyone knows they are on their way to Lekar and their eventual executions, a fact any NPC will share with the heroes bleakly. Hopefully, the heroes will immediately start plotting their escape. As they do so, they are approached by the young Vistana, who is a fellow prisoner.

If the heroes escaped the Falkovnian soldiers, or were turned away from Stangengrad without incident, the young Vistana catches up with them on the open road.

The young man's name is Vito Romenza. He was travelling with his family (who earn their living as entertainers) from Nartok in Darkon to Lekar in Falkovnia, and passed through Stangengrad one day before the spy was captured and the city gates closed. The family chose to travel along a little-used wagon trail that follows the river west to Lekar, pausing to camp for a couple of nights and do some fishing. It was an unfortunate choice; the Romenza *vardos* were ambushed by bandits late last night.

Vito was the only one to escape; his grandmother, aunt, and two sisters were all captured. Unwilling to tackle three well-armed men himself and frantic to find help, Vito fled back along the trail to Stangengrad. He hoped to enlist the aid of the soldiers, but the Talons were too busy with their spy hunting to bother sending out a squad to rescue "a handful of insignificant Vistani women." At the same time, the soldiers were suspicious of Vito. Depending on the circumstances the heroes find themselves in, Vito either fled, or was captured and tossed in the wagon.

Uncertain what to do next, Vito consulted the tarokka deck. The cards bid him to seek help from strangers to this land, and offered a description that matches that of the heroes. (The Dungeon Master will need to make up the details, using significant elements of the

heroes' appearance.) He has thus approached them. Read the players the following:

> A teenager with dusky skin and dark hair approaches you, his face displaying a mixture of fear and determination. He looks harmless enough, an unarmed, unarmored boy in mud-splattered boots and trousers, wearing a rather ornate gold shirt with a torn sleeve. A black kerchief is knotted around his head.
>
> Nervously clearing his throat, he begins to speak. As he does so, one hand strays to his belt and begins absently fingering a velvet pouch that hangs there. It holds a small, square object.
>
> "Please," he says in a voice trembling with emotion, "I need your help. My family was attacked last night by thieves. They've captured our *vardos* and are holding my grandmother, aunt, and sisters hostage.
>
> "I asked the soldiers to rescue them, but they refused, and now I'm here. I have no one else to turn to; none of my own people are nearby. I was going to try to attack the thieves myself, but the cards told me that I would find someone who would help me if I waited on the road to Stangengrad. And here you are."

If the heroes ask what the cards are, Vito shows them his tarokka deck, and explains that he can use it to "see into the future and ask guidance from the fates." He offers to tell each of the heroes' fortunes, if they will help him to rescue his family.

If the heroes ask for payment in exchange for their aid, Vito can either offer one or two things. If they are all prisoners on their way to being executed, he can pick the lock on the wagon and allow everyone in the back to escape and, whether the heroes are prisoners or not, he will offer them an herbal concoction that is useful in combatting the effects of poison. There are three doses of this "potion" back at his camp, assuming the thieves haven't stolen them.

In game terms, this herbal remedy provides a +2 bonus to any saving throw vs. poison. It has the same duration as a potion, remaining effective for 1d4+4 turns and can thus be consumed before a poison is even

encountered. Its formula is a secret; even Vito does not know all the ingredients.

Once the heroes agree to help him, and any escape from the Falkovnians has been made (the DM should permit the escape to succeed, but make it seem to the players as though their characters are in mortal danger the whole time), Vito talks with great animation (and great love) of his family. The boy is very fond of his stern and scrupulously honest grandmother Plishka, his devil-may-care aunt Sophia, his quiet and studious eight-year-old sister Misha, and his boisterous and flirtatious sister Rafina, who at 16 is already a rare beauty. He fears for their safety, and wants to make his way back to the camp with all possible speed.

If the heroes think to ask, Vito can provide them with a partial description of the bandits. He knows that there were three of them, humans with a desperate look in their eyes. He's not certain, but he thinks he saw "something odd" about one of the bandits. "The fellow's shirt was open, and it seemed he had a hole right through his chest," Vito says. "But it may just have been a trick of the campfire light. I didn't get a very good look at him. What I do know for sure is that he had a medallion that was shaped like a human skull. He kept twirling it around his hand and then unwinding it."

If the heroes were transported here from their homeworld, they might still have the medallion they discovered on their dying friend. If they show it to Vito, he acknowledges that it looks just like the one the bandit had. Even if they don't have the medallion, they may still recognize the similar skull motif. The DM should make sure there is at least a hint that the brigands are connected to the incidents at the mansion. Hopefully, the heroes will decide that they need to find these cultists and try to get answers as to where they are, how they got here, and how they might get home again.

If the heroes experienced the events of *Death Unchained*, this description of a man with a hole through his chest should ring a bell. Members of the Ebon Fold (who were recruited from among the impaled dead and restored to life by their master) all had a similar wound. Vito has provided the heroes with a lead to the cultists they were hunting.

A River of Tears

The journey back to the Romenza encampment via the riverside trail takes four hours. When the heroes reach the campsite, read the following to the players:

> The wagon trail is little used, its ruts choked with weeds and brambles. It winds through a thick forest of moss-matted trees, following the riverbank.
>
> At last the trail opens up into a clearing that overlooks the sluggishly flowing river. Two brightly colored, enclosed wagons have been pulled off to the side of the clearing. Their doors stand open; there is no sign of movement inside.
>
> Just behind the wagons, two horses lie dead. They seem to have been killed where they were tethered, and one has been butchered. The roasted remains of its haunch lie beside a campfire that has burned down to ashes.
>
> Clothing and personal belongings are scattered everywhere; many have been torn or broken. A number of small cages lie smashed open on the ground.
>
> Closer to the river, a number of trees have been felled. Wood chips and bits of rope lie trampled into the mud of the riverbank.

There is no sign of the thieves. Vito expresses the faint hope that his family was able to flee while the ruffians were looting their camp. He suggests that the *vardos* be searched, to see if there are any clues, and braces himself for whatever he might find inside.

Vito's grandmother, aunt, and two sisters were all killed by the thieves. Their bodies lie on the bunk beds where they were murdered in their sleep. When the heroes discover the first of these corpses, read the players the following:

> Pale sunlight streams in through the open door of the wagon, illuminating what at first glance appears to be a figure asleep on a bunk bed. But a closer inspection reveals the horrible truth. The body of the woman and the blankets under which she lies are marked with a

series of deep, coin-sized punctures. She is quite clearly dead. Her mouth and eyes gape wide open, stretched into a grimace of utter horror.

You can see enough of the body to tell that it is oddly colored. Instead of having the pale hue of death, the skin of the corpse is a bright, cherry red. It looks oddly smooth and soft, and glistens slightly.

If the corpse is touched or moved, add the following:

As soon as the body is touched (moved) the flesh begins to quiver, as if some invisible hand was shaking it. Then skin and tissue liquefy and slide away. Within seconds, all that is left are a gleaming white skull and bones, lying in a pile of gelatinous red blubber.

Now the gory mass begins to steam and hiss, releasing a foul stench into the air. It slowly shrinks in upon itself and turns the dull, crusted color of old blood. Then it disappears entirely, leaving only an ugly stain that forms a dark halo around the pale white bones.

Viewing this awful transformation is cause for a horror check. If Vito is present (as he certainly will be, unless the heroes forcibly prevent him from entering the *vardo*), he screams in terror and runs outside. He suffers the effects of a failed horror check (mental shock) and must make a successful saving throw vs. paralyzation (by rolling 13 or more on 1d20) to regain his composure. From this point on, whenever Vito sees a similar transformation he must make a horror check (at a –2 penalty) to avoid being plunged back into a state of deep mental shock.

When Vito at last recovers, he insists on burying the bodies and saying a simple, tearful blessing over them. He then offers to tell one of the heroes' fortunes, in payment for their help (see the section **Tarokka Meanings** for the results). This done, he takes one last look at the camp. Read the following to the players:

With clenched hands and a tear-streaked face, the young man looks around at the shattered camp. Then something rustles in the underbrush and a trembling smile lights his lips.

"Tickle!" he cries. "Is that you?"

The bushes part, and a tiny, tailless monkey wearing a gold shirt and a black scarf knotted around its head peers out. Seeing Vito, it rushes forward to clamber up into the young man's outstretched arms.

Fresh tears pouring from his eyes, Vito cradles the monkey in his arms. "Oh Tickle," he moans. "At least you are alive."

Tickle the monkey is Vito's pride and joy, a runt that he bottle-fed after its mother died. The creature now is the Vistana's sole source of comfort, one he will defend with his life. It will accompany Vito everywhere he goes from this point on. It will also (with annoying frequency and without any instructions from Vito) pick the heroes' pockets. If they try to prevent it from doing this, it bites them. The Dungeon Master should ensure that this happens at least once or twice, since it sets up two encounters that occur later in this adventure, and should remember to always describe the monkey as being tailless.

Tickle turns over anything he steals to Vito, who tries to return these items to their proper owners before their absence is noticed. His chance of success is equal to his chance at pick-pocketing. If caught "stealing," Vito confesses that his monkey took the item and explains that he was trying to return it.

Tickle (Mammal, Small: Monkey): AC 8; MV 9; HD 1+1; hp 4; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1 (bite or hurled stone); SZ T (1' tall); ML avg (8); Int semi- (3); AL N; XP 15.

Notes: Tickle is trained to pick pockets upon receiving a hand signal from Vito. His chance of success is 30%.

The campsite has been looted of valuables, but the three doses of herbal anti-poison remedy can be found in one of the *vardos*.

There are several clues as to where the thieves went. The camp fire ashes and haunch of horse meat are still warm, suggesting that the murderers departed that morning after eating breakfast. The wood chips, rope, and drag marks near the river suggest that they built and launched a raft.

The thieves have, in fact, crossed the river into neighboring Darkon. By the time the heroes arrived at the Vistani campsite, the thieves had already reached the other shore.

The heroes could build their own raft or could use some other means of crossing the river. It is about one mile wide, but has a slow current and can be crossed by swimming. There is a 5% chance per swimmer (cumulative, rolled once) that the swimmers are attacked by a small school of giant gar.

Gar, Giant (1d6): AC 3; MV Sw 30; HD 8; hp 38 each; THAC0 13; #AT 1; Dmg 5d4 (bite); SZ L (8' long); ML average (10); Int non- (0); AL N; XP 2,000 each.

Out of the Mud

The river flows to the west, thus the thieves were carried in this direction when they made the crossing. They abandoned their raft on the Darkon side of the river, about two miles downstream. A trail of footprints leads away from the raft, west along the riverbank.

As the heroes follow this trail, read the following to the players:

> There is something ominously different about this side of the river. The skies have darkened overhead and are filled with gloomy, brooding clouds. The mud of the riverbank squelches underfoot, emitting a faint odor of decay with each step you take. The reeds along the river stir and rustle, as if filled with whispering spirits.
>
> Somewhere ahead, thunder grumbles in the distance. A drop or two of cold rain begins to fall.
>
> It may be just your imagination, but you are almost certain that you felt something squirm under your foot as you set it down in the mud just now.

The Dungeon Master should give the heroes a moment or two to react before adding the passage that follows. Unless the heroes are able to fly or levitate, they are going to be under attack.

> It wasn't your imagination after all! Something is moving underfoot, causing the muddy ground to heave as if it were about to erupt. Now you can see the foul monstrosity that it is spawning. Rising out of the mud is a creature, shaped like a human but entirely covered in mud. Its eye sockets gape like the black pits of the abyss, and in the rapidly fading light you can see, beneath the mud, faint patches of white that may be death-pale skin or even bone. The creature lurches toward you, arms outstretched, as if about to enwrap you in its foul embrace.

A total of 2d4 mud zombies rise up out of the mud to attack the heroes. These monsters are one of Azalin's means of protecting his domain from invaders. With Vlad Drakov always planning a new invasion strategy, the mud zombies provide an effective, not to mention intimidating, first line of defense in out of the way places. Although the zombies are too slow to gain surprise, the attack is cause for a fear check.

The zombies continue the attack until they are destroyed. Due to their slow speed, the heroes can flee from the zombies, but these magical creatures are relentless in their pursuit, and stay on the heroes' trail no matter what. Eventually the heroes will have to rest or sleep, and then the mud zombies will catch up with them again.

Part way through the battle, the skies overhead open up and it begins to rain. This will eventually (within 3d4 combat rounds) wash away the zombies' muddy covering, revealing their skeletal forms. Unfortunately for the heroes, it also makes the ground very slippery underfoot. During each round in which the rain is falling, heroes engaged in strenuous physical activity (combat, for example) must make a successful Dexterity check to keep their footing in the mud. If the roll fails, the hero slips and nearly falls, and the zombie gains the initiative for that round.

Mud Zombie (2d4): AC 8; MV 6; HD 4; hp 14 each; THAC0 17; #AT 1 or 2; Dmg 1d6/1d6 (claw/claw); SA disease, suffocation; SD immune to thrusting weapons, poison; SW water; MR immune to *charm*, *hold*, *sleep*, *death magic*, and mind-controlling spells; SZ M (5–6' tall); ML fearless (20); Int non- (0); AL NE; XP 650 each.

Notes: Wounds caused by a mud zombie become infected, due to organisms in the mud. Unless magically treated, these wounds take twice as long to heal. Unless the victim makes a successful saving throw vs. poison, he also suffers a mild fever that reduces Strength by 1 point for 1d6 days.
If a mud zombie successfully strikes with both hands in a single round, the victim is held. On the next round, the victim must roll 1d20 equal to or under Strength to break free. Failure results in 1d4 points of suffocation damage. Attacks by piercing or thrusting weapons do not harm a mud zombie.
Rain washes away the mud covering in 3d4 rounds. Total immersion in water or a direct hit by holy water (which inflicts 2d4 points of damage) washes the mud away in 1d4 rounds. Without its mud covering, the skeletal zombie cannot cause disease or suffocation.

Once the heroes have either defeated or fled from the mud zombies, they can try to pick up the trail of the thieves once more. The heavy rain and battle have obliterated this portion of the trail, but a short distance further on, tracks can again be seen, this time heading inland, into the woods to the north. Where before the heroes were following the footprints of perhaps half a dozen people, now they can see only a single set of footprints. Still, it is the only trail they have to follow.

Shelter From the Storm

As the heroes follow the footprints, the weather steadily worsens. The heavy rain resumes and a cold wind starts to blow. Read the following to the players:

> The rain is falling steadily now. Large, heavy drops of it splash down, turning the ground underfoot to mud. A cold wind is blowing, slicing through your wet clothes and chilling you to the bone. So dark are the clouds overhead that it is all but impossible to see. Worse yet, the trail you were following has vanished, obliterated by the pounding rain. A flash of lightning splits the sky and a mere heartbeat later, thunder rumbles directly overhead with a crash so loud that it strikes like a physical blow.
>
> Ahead, through the gloom of the storm, you can see a faint yellow light. The chilling wind shifts, carrying a hint of cinnamon-laced bread and wood smoke. Then this promise of warmth and comfort is gone, driven away by the lashing rain.

The smell of baking and the light are coming from a cottage half a mile ahead. If the heroes think to ask, the tracks they were following seemed to have been leading toward it.

Since heroes are by nature suspicious folk, some coaxing may be required to send them in the direction of the cottage. If need be, the Dungeon Master can stage an attack by more mud zombies (or can have the original mud zombies catch up to the heroes, reduced by the rain to their skeleton-only form, if the heroes fled from them rather than defeating them in combat). The obvious place of refuge is the cottage. When the heroes at last approach it, read the following to the players:

> The light and wood smoke are coming from a cottage that is nestled deep in the woods. The place seems innocent enough, warm light shines through its windows and the exterior is brightly painted. A small barn stands beside the cottage; bleating goats can be heard within it.

If the heroes look around the grounds before approaching the house, add the following:

> The farm itself seems normal: a barn filled with a few dozen goats and about ten chickens, a tool shed, and a small vegetable garden. There is only one thing amiss; the mangled carcass of a goat lies a short distance from the barn in a pool of blood. Its throat has been chewed open. Clearly some sort of predatory animal managed to sneak into the barn for an easy meal.

Once the heroes have knocked on the door, add the following:

> The door is opened by a kindly looking man with white hair and a beard. Aromatic smoke curls from a clay pipe that is clamped between his teeth. He is dressed in simple peasant clothing, woollen pants and a frayed work shirt.
>
> Lowering his pipe, the old man peers out into the gloom. "Mama!" he calls, "we have visitors!"

A woman with white hair and a flour-smeared apron bustles into view behind him. She is carrying a tray of buns in her mitten-clad hands; the sweet smells of cinnamon and sugar rise from it. "Who is it?" she asks, squinting to see better.

A young boy, perhaps twelve years old, peeks out from behind her. His hair is damp and freshly combed, and the smell of bath soap clings to him. He stares at you, wide-eyed, his shirt half buttoned. The woman turns and waves him away. "Lay out some extra plates, Erhard. We have company."

The cottage is home to Mama and Papa Milhausen, and their "son" Erhard. The couple are in their 60s and raise goats for milking; four dozen of these animals are housed in a barn beside the cottage.

The Milhausens are pleasant and good-hearted people who adopted Erhard eight years ago, after finding him wandering alone in the woods. All he was able to tell them was that his parents were killed by "evil men."

The Milhausens did not realize it at the time, but they had taken a wolf-in-sheep's-clothing into their home. Erhard appears to be a normal 12-year-old human boy but is, in fact, a wolfwere. His wolfwere parents were killed by hunters who somehow overlooked the cub.

Erhard has, of late, been succumbing to his natural lust for blood. Until quite recently, he satisfied it by occasionally savaging one of the goats. The carcass outside is his doing; he has just had a bath to wash off its blood. If the heroes specifically observe the bath water, they can see that it has a faint pink tinge. If they look in Erhard's room, they can find, under his bed, a shirt with a bloody front and dirt-encrusted sleeves.

If questioned, Erhard admits to finding the injured goat and trying to stop its bleeding. Strangely enough, he didn't bother to tell his parents about his discovery. "It was already dead, anyway," he says with a shrug.

If the heroes ask about the dead goat, Papa Milhausen tells them that he has "had some trouble with the wolves, of late."

If the heroes ask about the boy, the Milhausens simply say that he is their son. Only if it is pointed out that they are too old to have a son that young will they admit that the boy is adopted, but only after sending him out of the room. "He doesn't need to be reminded about the cruel death of his poor parents," they say. Only if the heroes specifically ask do the Milhausens admit that they never actually met the boy's parents.

Both Mama and Papa have realized that Erhard is more than he seems. They've seen the wild side of his soul and Papa even suspects that their little boy is the one who has been killing their goats. But Erhard has brought love and warmth into their lives that has been missing since their only son was killed years ago while selling milk in the market in Stangengrad (he was mistaken for a Darkonian spy and executed). They will not listen to anything the heroes might say against their "son."

The Milhausens offer the heroes every hospitality, everything from a good home-cooked meal to a hot bath and cozy bed for the night. They are genuinely kind and willing to share whatever they have. During this respite, Vito offers to tell another of the heroes' fortunes.

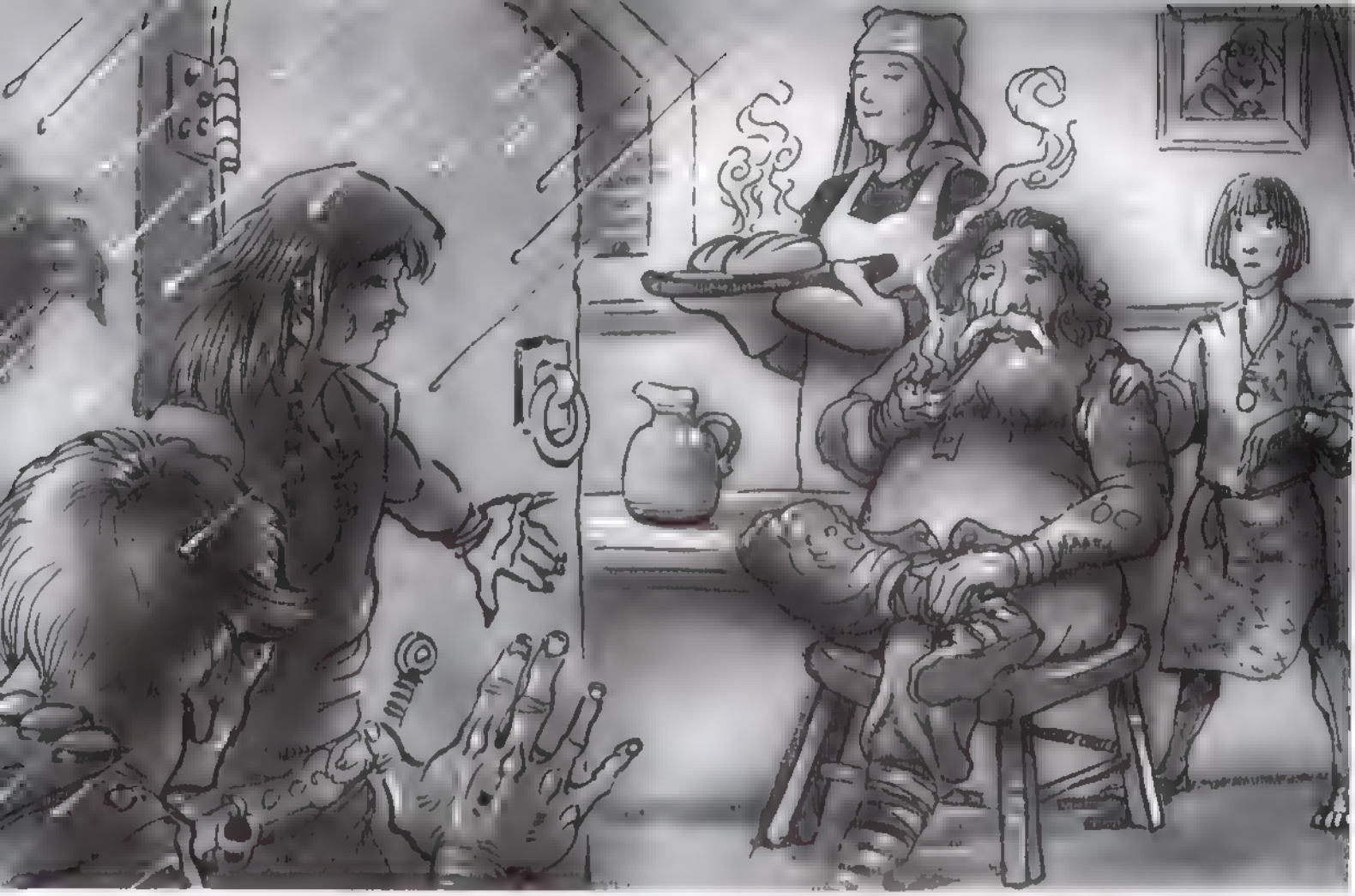
If the heroes mention the thieves and the fact that the trail they were following seemed to be leading to this cottage, the Milhausens look thoughtful. "That must be the fellow I turned away earlier today," Papa Milhausen mutters. "I didn't like the look of him. There was something odd about the way he looked at Mama and the tense manner in which he held himself. I saw blood stains on his clothes and thought he might be up to no good. So instead of inviting him in, I gave him a loaf of bread and sent him on his way."

The thief didn't make it very far. He became Erhard's first human kill. The boy, in wolf form, tore out his throat then buried the remains in a shallow grave a short distance from the cottage. Even now, the rain is washing the rain from the corpse.

Before burying the body, Erhard searched its pockets and found a dagger with a hollow crystal blade. He hid this dagger in his room, where it is soon to be discovered by Tickle.

The Dungeon Master can play out the encounter between the heroes and the Milhausens for as long as it keeps the players' interest. Once that interest is starting to wane, it's time for Tickle to make his discovery. Read the players the following:

You hear an angry shout from one of the bedrooms. A moment later, Tickle comes racing out of that room with



something shiny cradled in his arms. The boy Erhard runs after him, shaking his fist. As Tickle leaps into Vito's arms for protection, Erhard skids to a stop and begins sucking on a bleeding finger. "It bit me!" he says, pointing at the monkey, which hisses back at him

The object in the monkey's arms is a *blood blade* (see description on page 21). It is a dagger with an ordinary hilt, but with a hollow blade, round in cross-section, that looks as though it were made of crystal or glass. Two ounces of dull red liquid slosh around inside it; the hollow space inside the blade seems to be two-thirds full.

If the heroes think to ask, the blade looks exactly the right size to have made the puncture marks on the bodies of the dead Romenza women.

If Erhard is questioned about the dagger, he reluctantly admits to "finding it in the yard." If asked to show where he picked it up, he leads the heroes outside—only to discover that the rain has washed the dirt away from the corpse he buried. Read the players the following:

Erhard stops short, staring with wide eyes at something just ahead. Following his gaze, you see the corpse of a man, lying in a hollow in the ground. The rain pelts down on his pale face and torn throat, washing away the thin coating of soil that once covered him. His shirt hangs open; in his chest is a much older wound, a deep puncture that looks as though it should have killed the man long ago.

Erhard is deathly afraid of having his true nature discovered. He loves the Milhausens, considers them his parents, and wants to spend the rest of his life with them. He would never do anything to harm them.

If the heroes accuse him of having anything to do with the death of the body in front of them, Erhard will panic and change into his wolf form. All the while trying to explain himself to the heroes.

Just then the Milhausen's burst out of the house pleading for the heroes to leave their boy alone. "He's a good boy," they wail. "All he needs is to be taught right from wrong, like any other child. We all love one another, that's all that really matters." They will do everything

they can think of to convince the heroes to let Erhard live and to keep their "family secret" from being revealed to the townsfolk in Nartok (where they now sell their milk).

The heroes now face a moral dilemma: should they trust the love this family has to overcome the boy's animalistic nature, or should they do what they can to save the elderly couple from the possibility of Erhard turning on them (either kill him or chase him off permanently)? Their decision will have repercussions later in this adventure. The DM should note not only what the group's decision is, but which heroes voted to leave the family alone and which ones voted to get rid of Erhard.

If it looks as though the heroes are going to attack him, Erhard bursts into song. All of the characters within hearing range must make a saving throw vs. spell to avoid being struck with lethargy. Erhard then runs away into the woods, attacking anyone who tries to stop him. If he succeeds in escaping, he does not return. If he fails to escape, then the heroes will probably kill him. Either way Mama and Papa Milhausen are devistated; they have just lost their only son . . . again!

Mama and Papa Milhausen, hm/hf, 0-Level: AC 10; MV 12 (unencumbered); hp 4; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1–2 (punch); SW near-sighted; SZ M (5'4" and 5'8"); ML avg (9); Int avg (9); AL NG.

Erhard Milhausen (human form): AC 10; MV 12 (unencumbered); HD 3+1; hp 11; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1 (punch); SA Singing brings on lethargy; SD +1 or better magical weapons to hit; SW wolfsbane, cold wrought iron; MR 10%; SZ S (4'10" tall); ML avg (9); Int high (13); AL CN.

Erhard Milhausen (wolf form): AC 3; MV 15; HD 3+1; hp 11; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 2d6 (bite); SA singing brings on lethargy; SD +1 or better magical weapons to hit; SW wolfsbane, cold wrought iron; MR 10%; SZ S (4' long); ML elite (14); Int high (13); AL CN; XP 975.

Notes: Anyone who hears a wolfwere's song and fails a saving throw vs. spell is overcome with lethargy, which has the same effects as a *slow* spell. This effect lasts for 1d4+4 rounds.

Blood Blades

The hilt of a *blood blade* is made of normal metal, but the blade is made of clear crystal. It is shaped much like the blade of a stiletto, with a long, thin blade that is round in cross section and hollow in the middle. *Blood blades* are thus piercing, rather than slashing weapons.

Although the blade appears to be made of a breakable material, it is impervious to normal damage. It cannot be broken by a *shatter* spell.

A *blood blade* inflicts only one point of damage each time it strikes. Each successful hit also drains one level of life force from its victim, resulting in the loss of one experience level and a corresponding, permanent loss of hit points. This loss is equivalent to the normal hit die for the victim's character class. (A wizard loses 1d4 hit points, a rogue loses 1d6 hit points, etc.) Any abilities linked with that experience level are also lost.

If a victim is drained of all life force, his body undergoes a hideous transformation. All skin, tissue, and internal organs turn to a substance that resembles gelatinous blood. As soon as the corpse is touched, this slides from the bones (see description on page 15).

Each time a *blood blade* drains a level of life force, its crystal blade fills with half an ounce of bright red blood in which the stolen life force has been concentrated. This liquid remains inside the hollow blade until the dagger can be inserted into one of the five skull-shaped repositories currently inside the Temple of the Eternal Order in Nartok.

A *blood blade* does not drain life force from a character protected by a *negative plane protection* spell. This spell instead inflicts damage upon the wielder of the *blood blade*; see the spell description in the *Realm of Terror* book for details.

If a *dispel magic* spell is cast upon a *blood blade*, the dagger becomes non-magical. The blade now may be broken by either magical or mundane means, freeing the blood inside it. But unless the blade is carefully cracked open, this blood will spill and be forever lost.

Each *blood blade* can hold up to six levels of life force (three ounces of blood). If a character whose life force was stolen drinks this blood, his life force is restored, at a rate of one level per half-ounce of blood consumed. At the same time, any lost hit points and experience levels are regained.

Note: This process will *not* restore life to the dead.

Drinking human blood is cause for a powers check. There is a 1% chance that a neutral character will come to the notice of the dark powers, a 2% chance for a good character, and a 5% chance for any character whose faith regards blood drinking as an unholy act.

It is possible for a character to boost his experience level beyond its original level by drinking from one of these magical daggers. For every half-ounce that is consumed, the character goes up one level and gains the appropriate number of hit points (e.g. 1d6 for a cleric). However, using a *blood blade* in this manner results in an automatic failure of the powers check.

If the Dungeon Master has run the previous adventure in this series, the heroes may notice similarities between the *death shards* from *Death Unchained* and the *blood blades* in this one. Physically, the two weapons are identical. In fact, some of the *blood blades* may at one time have been *death shards*. At the end of *Death Unchained* all the *death shards* in the lair were destroyed, but any that were outside the complex remained intact. Rather than shattering, these weapons were magically transformed into *blood blades*, and now function as described above.

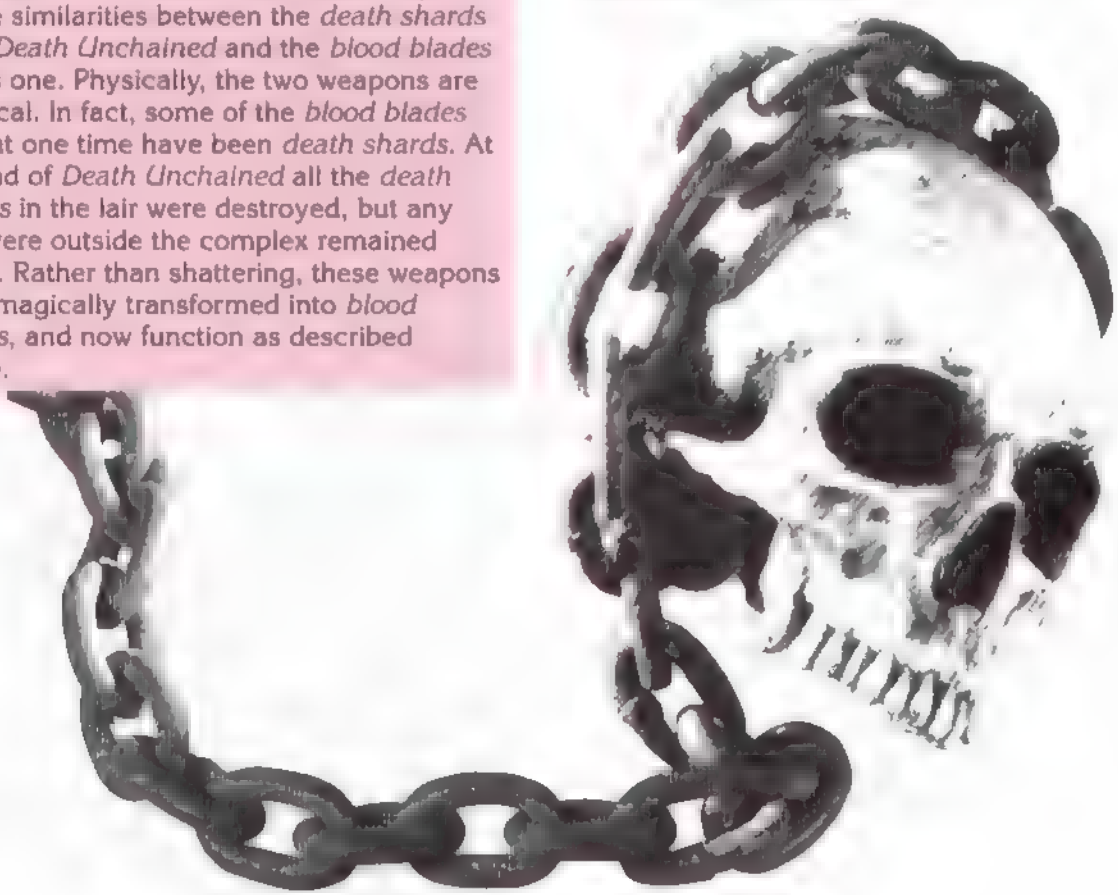
Following the Dagger

The trail of the killers seems to have gone cold, but once the *blood blade* is in the heroes' hands, Vito will tell them that he can use it to pick up the trail again. He does this by using an ancient Vistani divination technique which allows him to locate an item's owner. (A description of this ability can be found on page 60.)

To use this power, Vito suspends the *blood blade* from a string. He then moves tentatively in different directions; when he is moving in the general direction of the owner of the dagger, the *blood blade* begins to twirl in a slow circle and he will feel it softly pulling towards its owner.

By using this technique, Vito can lead the heroes north to the city of Nartok. Once in that city, he can lead them to the very doors of the Temple of the Eternal Order (now the headquarters of Lowellyn Dachine, the "true owner" of all of the *blood blades*).

The two surviving Ebon Fold members (the thieves who murdered the Romenza family) have fled to this temple.



A Doorway To Death

I approached the confines of death. I approached the gods below and the gods above, and I stood beside them, and I worshipped them.

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

The *blood blade* may lead the heroes to the Temple of the Eternal Order in Nartok, but getting inside this impressive structure is another matter. The temple is open to the general public only on evenings when services are held. The Dungeon Master should roll 1d6; on a 1–3, the temple will be open the day after the heroes arrive in Nartok; on a 4–5, it will be open two days after their arrival; on a 6, it will be open three days after their arrival. The temple opens at the sunset; the services run until midnight.

At the DM's discretion, one of the evenings of worship that occurs while the heroes are in Nartok may correspond with the Night of the Dead. Refer to the section describing the Eternal Order, on page 57, for details on this religious tradition.

Until the evening of worship occurs, the main entrance to the temple is locked up tight, and the side doors may only be entered by priests (or by members of the Kargat and the Ebon Fold). These entrances are all locked and magically warded against intruders.

A description of the exterior of Nartok's Temple of the Eternal Order can be found on page 26. The Dungeon Master should refer to it when the heroes first spot the temple. In the meantime, until the heroes actually get inside, the two encounters that follow are designed to keep them busy in the city itself.

An overview of the city of Nartok is given on page 58. Much of this information can be summarized by Vito, who has visited this city on many occasions. The DM may paraphrase any of the information from that section which is not in italics but should do so only if Vito is specifically asked for information on the city.

It should be relatively easy for the heroes to find an inn to stay at overnight. Visitors to Nartok are commonplace, as the city is on the main trading route on the road to Falkovnia.

During this break in the action, Vito offers to tell a fortune for another of the heroes.

At some point shortly after their arrival, have one of Nartok's citizens caution the heroes about displaying magical items in public. To allay the hero's suspicions, this friendly warning might perhaps come from an individual who was originally from the same homeland as the hero, but who now regards himself as a "Darkonian," perhaps a bartender at an inn or a merchant in the marketplace.

Immediately after this warning is given, the Dungeon Master should alert the hero to the fact that he is being watched, from the shadows, by a member of the Nartok militia. Later that day, the individual who gave the warning disappears and is never seen again. If asked, friends and acquaintances whisper that the disappearance must be the work of "the Kargat."

If the heroes ask questions about the prohibition on magical items, any citizen of Nartok can tell them that these items must be turned over to the temple for destruction, "lest they be used against the living by the dead." It is said that if the items are not turned over, "death's handmaiden" will come to claim them. This warning will have repercussions in the section **Death's Handmaiden**, on page 24.

A Brush With the Law

Three corporals of Nartok's militia notice Vito holding the *blood blade*. They approach the heroes and begin questioning them, trying to determine whether the unusual looking weapon is a magical item and whether the heroes are carrying any other magical items. If the heroes admit that the *blood blade* or any of their possessions are magical (or act in an evasive and suspicious manner) the soldiers order the heroes to turn these items in at the temple during the next midnight mass.

At this point, an officer of the Kargat approaches (the Dungeon Master should use the wereboar Lars Snegrin, who is described on page 32). Thinking that the heroes might be members of the Ebon Fold, Lars uses that society's secret sign, a fist drawn across the throat.

The DM should act out this secret sign for the players while speaking in character as Lars. If any of the players respond in kind (or says that his character is drawing a fist across his throat) Lars berates the corporals for "interrupting state business" and sends them on their way with a cuff or a kick. He then instructs the heroes to "meet me later, at the side door of the temple." If the characters later decide to look for Lars at the temple, see **Getting Inside**, page 27.

Lars then continues on his way to a nearby pub, where he spends 1d4+1 hours drinking, and later returns to the temple. He serenades the pub patrons with his magical tin whistle, causing them great pain, and then leaves in an angry huff when they fail to appreciate his music. (No one dares to chastise him since he's a member of the Kargat.)

If the heroes try to accompany Lars to the pub, or try to meet up with him there later, he drives them off with shouts and abusive language. He's in a surly mood and doesn't want any company. If they want to follow him, they'll have to do so in secret.

If the secret sign is not returned by the heroes Lars orders the corporals to confiscate the dagger "and take it to the temple at once." He then leaves for the pub. It doesn't even dawn on the dim-witted wereboar that the heroes might be more than a match for the corporals or that he should arrest the heroes.

If the heroes fight and defeat the militia, they can continue on as before. If any of the militia escape, they hurry back to their headquarters to file a report. The militia (and their Kargat masters) now will be on the lookout for the heroes and will try to capture them whenever they are seen.

Nartok Militia (3): AC 6 (studded leather, shield); MV 12 (lightly encumbered); HD 2; hp 11; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (short sword); SZ M (6' tall); ML steady (12); Int avg (10); AL NE; XP 35.

Death's Handmaiden

This encounter assumes that the heroes are staying overnight in Nartok and that the militia have noticed (or been informed of) a magical item in the hands of the heroes that should be confiscated. This item might be the *blood blade* or it might be one of the heroes' weapons or possessions.

When a magical item is to be confiscated in Nartok, the resident imp of the Temple of the Eternal Order is sent out to do the collecting. This imp is the personal "servant" of Jeremias

Grimshaw, bishop of Nartok. (The general public, of course, does not know of the imp's connection with the temple. They believe it is a fiend that comes directly from the netherworld in which the dead dwell.)

The imp performs its collection duties by night, polymorphing into giant rat form to move freely about the city while searching for the person who matches the description it has been given. Once it has found that individual, it uses its *detect magic* ability to spot the desired item (and any others that might be in the vicinity). It gathers up these objects, then polymorphs into its true imp form and delivers the coup de grace as the victim sleeps, stinging the target with its poison tail. It then flies rapidly back to the temple under cover of an *invisibility* spell, the confiscated magical items clasped in its arms.

The encounter with the imp itself takes place at night in whatever dwelling the heroes are staying at.

The imp first spies on the heroes in its giant rat form. (The Dungeon Master should mention that the heroes see a rat at some point that evening, blending this fact in with the general description of the inn.) Observing the fact that Vito owns a monkey, the imp decides to use this form when it sneaks into the target character's room.

Note: If the imp's target is Vito, the DM should try to ensure that at least one of the heroes is sharing a room with him. Vito should *not* be killed in this encounter.

During its intrusion into the target's room, the imp makes a noise that awakens at least one of the heroes there. This character is likely to mistake the imp for Tickle; the only differences are that Tickle wears clothes and has no tail, while the imp in monkey form wears no clothes and has a tail. The description that follows is written to reveal these clues, but only to a player who has been paying attention!

> A clattering noise awakens you. Looking around your darkened room, you see the source of the sound. The monkey is hanging by its tail from your bedpost, idly scratching its furry chest. The creature has knocked a candlestick to the floor. Peering at you with a mischievous grin, it reaches for the (name of magical item) that lies on the (location).

If the hero moves to prevent "Tickle" from taking the magical item, the imp immediately transforms into its true form. Read the following to the player:

> The monkey shudders, as if suddenly convulsed by fever. It's form darkens and blurs, sprouting tiny, batlike wings, dark leathery skin, and a wicked looking horn atop its head. Its face becomes a thing of nightmare, with beady eyes, a bulbous nose, and grinning, jagged teeth. Dropping to a squatting position, the creature lashes its tail back and forth; it hisses through the air like a whip about to strike.

The imp immediately attacks the hero, seeking to inflict a poisonous stab wound with its tail. At the same time, it lunges for the magical item that it has come to collect. If it succeeds in capturing this item, it immediately turns invisible and attempts to fly away. If necessary, it uses a *suggestion* spell to thwart pursuit.

If the imp is reduced to half of its hit points, it immediately flees. It returns the next night, however—unless the heroes go into hiding.

If the heroes succeed in killing the imp, the Dungeon Master should adjust the statistics of Jeremias Grimshaw (see page 29), who immediately loses four experience levels.

Kweikoth (Imp): AC 2; MV 6, Fl 18 (A); HD 2+2; hp 12; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (tail sting); SA poison; SD immune to cold, fire, and electricity, silver or magical weapon to hit, regeneration; MR 25%, resists spells as 7 Hit Die monster; SZ T (2' tall); ML avg (10); Int avg (10); AL LE; XP 650.

Notes: A successful hit by an imp's tail injects Type F poison; victims who fail a saving throw vs. poison instantly die. The imp can polymorph into giant rat or monkey form, and attacks using the natural weapons of those creatures (see below).
Imps regenerate 1 hit point per melee round. They can *detect magic* or become invisible at will. Once per day they can use a *suggestion*.

Imp in Monkey Form: AC 8; MV 9; HD 1+1; hp 7; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1 (bite); SD immune to cold, fire, and electricity, silver or magical weapon to hit, regeneration; MR 25%, resists spells as 7 Hit Die monster; SZ T (1' tall); ML avg (10); Int avg (10); AL LE; XP 650.

Imp in Giant Rat Form: AC 7; MV 12, Sw 6; HD 1/2; hp 4; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1–3 (bite); SA disease; SD immune to cold, fire, and electricity, silver or magical weapon to hit, regeneration; MR 25%, resists spells as 7 Hit Die monster; SZ T (2' long); ML avg (10); Int avg (10); AL LE; XP 650.

Notes: In its giant rat form, the imp's has a 5% chance (per wound) of infecting anyone it bites with a serious disease unless the victim makes a successful saving throw vs. poison.

Temple of the Eternal Order

While the Eternal Order pretends to be a religion that is dedicated to keeping the Hour of Ascension at bay by propitiating the dead, its members are in fact in league with the undead. For this reason, the temple is a sinkhole of evil. Non-evil priests who venture inside it suffer a –2 penalty when turning undead.

The layout of the temple is shown on the poster map. When the heroes first view the outside of the temple, read the following:

> You stand before a massive building, its walls constructed of dull black stone. Here and there, pale gray stones set into the facade are carved to resemble human faces, ones with wide eyes and a mouths that gape open, as if screaming in mortal terror. Clinging to the walls are patches of ivy, stems dry and brittle and leaves brown and dead.
>
> A huge dome caps the roof at the midpoint of the structure and is flanked by smaller domes to either side and to the rear. All are surfaced with mottled, bone-white tile. The domes are squat and oddly shaped, and bear a disturbing resemblance to poisonous mushrooms.
>
> Around the central dome is a ring of statues that resemble deformed humanoids—hunched, winged creatures that glare down with cold, stone eyes.
>
> The building is fronted by wide stone stairs that have been worn smooth by the passage of many feet. These staircases lead to four sets of double doors. The stone frame around each set of doors has been carved to produce the effect of a hideous, gaping mouth. The doors themselves are made of smooth, black wood, so polished that it shines like metal. The handles are made of bone and are carved into the shape of grinning skulls.
>
> Smaller sets of stairs on either side of the building lead to single doors of similar appearance.
>
> The walls that support the domed side and rear chambers of the building are set with stained glass windows. From the outside, it is difficult to see what these panels portray. But the odd shapes and somber colors of the glass create an unsettling effect.

The main (front) doors of the temple are barred and will not be opened until the next public worship is held.

The side doors are all locked; each of the temple priests (and the five Kargat officers) has a key. These keys are made of black wrought iron topped with an ivory skull. They also open all of the locked doors inside the temple.

The locks on the side doors may be picked or the barred doors at the front forced open, but any failed lockpicking attempt (or any attempt to open a door by brute force) triggers a *symbol* spell that has been placed upon the door. A glowing red skull appears on the door's surface; any character looking at it must make a successful saving throw vs. spell to avoid suffering wracking pains for 2d10 turns. During this time, the victims suffer a –4 penalty to their attack rolls and a –2 penalty to their Dexterity scores.

On the roof, there are 32 statues around the central dome.They look much like gargoyles and, indeed, radiate an aura of magic. They serve as the temple's "bells." On every fourth evening, at sunset, these statues open their mouths and sing in a ghastly chorus that can be heard throughout the city.

Anyone hearing these voices (which sound like the moaning of tortured souls) must make a successful saving throw vs. spell to avoid being affected by a *suggestion* spell that compels the character to go to the temple and participate in the evening service (see **The Midnight Mass**, page 36).

Getting Inside

The heroes' best option for getting inside the temple is simply to wait until the evening a service is held, then enter through the main doors with the throng of worshippers. Even if the priests or Kargat officers are actively looking for them, it should be easy for the heroes to lose themselves in the crowd of several hundred people that packs the temple's nave during a service. It should also be a simple matter to slip away from the crowd and hide in another part of the temple until the service is over.

Alternatively, the heroes may take Lars up on his instructions to meet him "at the side door of the temple." (See the section **A Brush With the Law**, page 24.) Unfortunately, Lars didn't tell them *which* side door to meet him at, or when.

Still, if the heroes wait until Lars is back at the temple (or have the good fortune to be delayed until that time), they can knock at any side door and say they are there to meet him. They do not even need to know his name (which he may have neglected to tell them at their first meeting). If they simply describe him, anyone living in the temple will know who they mean.

The door is answered by Pio Yolten, one of the temple priests. He opens the door a mere crack, and asks the heroes their business.

Pio Yolten, hm, P1: AC 9; MV 12 (unencumbered); hp 8; THAC0 20 (19 with magical dagger); #AT 1; Dmg 1d4+1 (magical dagger); SA spells; SZ M (5'10"); ML steady (11); Int avg (12); AL NE; XP 35.
Magical Items: +1 dagger.
Spells (reversed):
1st–*cause light wounds* (*cure light wounds*).

If Lars has not yet returned to the temple, Pio will not admit the heroes. He does not know the secret sign of the Ebon Fold, and the crystal-bladed *blood blade* means nothing to him. He tells the heroes to come back later and shuts the door in their faces.

If the heroes force their way inside and make a lot of noise in the process, 2d4 additional temple priests show up within 1d4 rounds to help toss them out (use the 1st-level Priest statistics on page 31). If the confrontation is loud enough, the priest Dominique Nagy (see page 30) and the Kargat officer Boris Gjorkin (see page 31) will arrive to take charge in

another 1d4 rounds. Each shouts orders at the priests, contradicting the orders of the other. Despite this obvious conflict, they eventually wind up working together to defeat the heroes. The priests will try to capture trespassers, the Kargat will try to kill them, but both will be satisfied with driving interlopers out of the temple.

If Lars has returned from his drinking bout, Pio asks the heroes to wait and closes the door again, locking it behind him. He then runs to find Lars. The wereboar is too inebriated to come to the door himself, but he tells Pio that he met "members of the Ebon Fold" in the streets earlier that day.

Whether or not the heroes can bluff their way into the temple depends upon the role-playing abilities of the players. If Pio admits them, he escorts them to the room currently shared by the two surviving Ebon Fold members (Room B6).

Only Vilna von Pessack (see page 33) is in this room. Vilna knows every member of the Ebon Fold by sight and immediately realizes that the heroes are impostors. He believes himself to be a vampire, a powerful creature who is more than able to deal with the heroes on his own. He haughtily dismisses Pio, invites the heroes in and then begins to toy with them, making veiled threats that hint at his supposed vampiric powers. Vilna is armed with a *blood blade*, but if the heroes are careful not to make too much noise, they should be able to dispose of him swiftly and silently.

Another option for getting inside the temple is for the heroes to sneak in, either by picking a lock, forcing one of the barred double doors at the front of the building, or breaking a stained glass window and climbing in. (The windows are six feet tall and three feet wide, and are positioned 15 feet above the ground.) Or they might use more subtle means to slip into the temple, magic, for example.

It is up to the Dungeon Master to judge the success of the incursion based upon the amount of noise made by the heroes. If they are loud and obvious, they are attacked by 2d4 temple priests and possibly by Dominique and Boris as well, who react as described above.

Alternately, the heroes might choose to watch the temple. Eventually one of the 1st-level Priests, Pio, will venture out on an errand. If the heroes succeed in ambushing Pio, the key that he carries can be used to open any of the temple's side doors.

If they are sneaky and silent, the heroes can explore the temple at will. It's a large, dimly lit place, full of shadowy corners in which to hide. Many of the rooms are unlocked; others can be entered using one of the keys carried by the priests. Skip ahead to the section **After Hours in the Temple**, page 40.

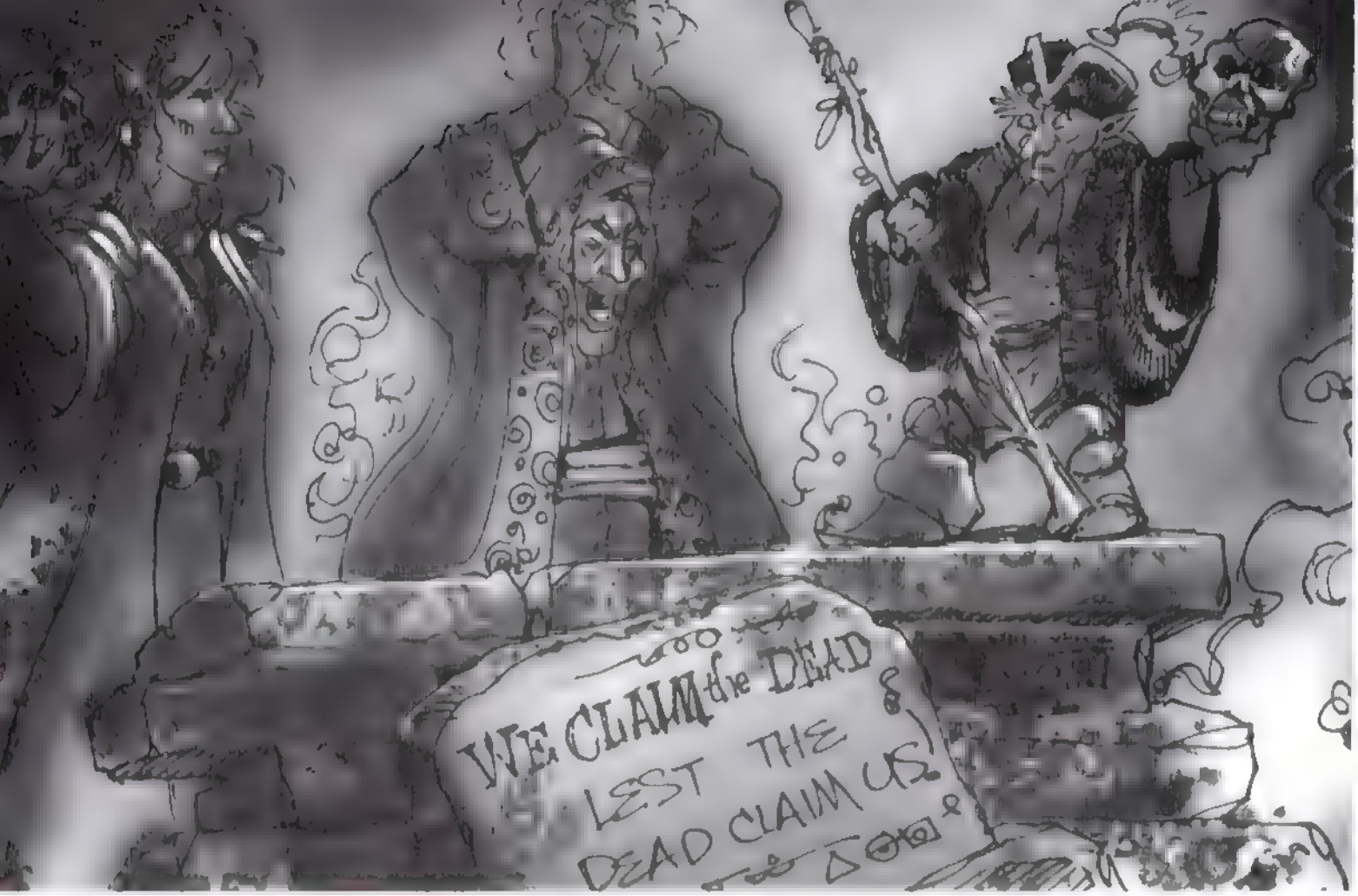
Occupants of the Temple

The occupants of Nartok's Temple of the Eternal Order are divided into two distinct factions. The first is the priesthood, the fifteen evil clerics who conduct the temple's midnight masses and perform the other duties of the state religion. This group is led by Bishop Jeremias Grimshaw, who is aided by his second-in-command, the drow elf Dominique Nagy, and by the mad gnome Burlin Netherwood. Twelve lay priests, all human, serve under them.

The second faction is made up of officers of the Kargat (Darkon's secret police force) and their minions. This group includes Lowellyn Dachine, in charge of constructing an *infernal machine* within the temple, four lycanthropes (Boris Gjorkin, Lars Snegrin, Francine Pavlina, and Pasha Bella), and the two surviving members of the Ebon Fold (Vilna von Pessack and Jurgen Yarlsboro).

The two groups are living in an uneasy alliance within the temple. The Kargat are solely interested in accumulating enough life force to power the *infernal machine*. They are using their *blood blades* to attack members of the congregation and have also desecrated several of the statues in the temple by replacing the heads of these statues with crystal skulls. Because the skulls are shielded by powerful illusions, the priests do not know what was done to the statues, but they do know that the Kargat are defiling them each time they insert a *blood blade* into a statue's eye. They are also angry at the authoritarian airs of the five Kargat officers, who seem to think that they can run roughshod over temple routine.

The priests' primary concern is to fleece the populace of Nartok, collecting both tithes and magical items from them. In retaliation for the Kargat officers upsetting the orderly activities of the temple, the priest have stopped sharing the magical items they seize with the Kargat.



Among the items seized was a *wand of negation*, which Dominique Nagy plans to use to "cleanse" the statues.

The Kargat officers suspect that the confiscated magical items are being hidden somewhere within the temple and are actively searching for them. They have not yet found the temple's hidden treasuries, however.

The Priests

The priests of the Eternal Order worship the gods of death and dress in ill-fitting, ash-colored robes. Their holy symbol (used to control the undead) is a small sickle with a blade of pure gold. When conducting services, the priests smear their faces with white clay, giving them a deathly pallor.

Bishop Jeremias Grimshaw, hm, P5: AC 8 (+2 *ring of protection*); MV 12 (unencumbered); hp 32; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 2d6 (garotte); SA strangulation, spells; SD spells; SW death of imp; MR 25% if imp within range; SZ M (5'5"); ML elite (13); AL NE; XP 1,400.

Notes: Jeremias' sole melee weapon is the garotte, a flexible length of wire with a handle at either end. Jeremias attacks from behind and wraps this wire around his victim's throat. A successful attack inflicts 2d6 points of damage. To avoid further damage, the victim must break free. This is done by making an open doors roll. One attempt may be made each round. Each failed attempt means that Jeremias is able to strangle the victim for another melee round, inflicting another 1d6 points of damage. Twice per day, Jeremias can use the power *Inspire fear*, which is similar to the 4th level wizard spell *fear*. As a priest of the death god, Jeremias can control the undead; use the Turning Undead table in the *Realm of Terror* book.

Jeremias is telepathically linked to the imp, Kwelkoth. Whenever the imp is within one mile of Jeremias (within the temple or the neighborhood immediately around it) the creature confers some of its powers upon him. Most importantly, it allows Jeremias to act as a 6th-level priest; when the imp is out of range, however, he acts as a 4th-level priest. See below for details.

S 12, D 16, Co 10, I 18, W 16, C 13

Appearance: Jeremias is in his mid-50s, with piercing eyes and a long, thin nose. He is completely bald and has jutting cheekbones that give his face an almost skeletal appearance. He dresses in plain gray robes and often shrouds his face by pulling up his hood. His status as bishop is indicated by sickles that are embroidered upon his sleeves in golden thread.

Personality: Jeremias is a somber individual; no one can ever recall having heard him laugh. He earned the position of bishop of Nartok by keeping his own counsel and trusting no one except the imp who helped him achieve this goal. He is not well liked by the priests at the temple, but he is feared and respected.

Magical Items: Jeremias wears a +2 *ring of protection* at all times. It is a plain silver band, set with a series of black, shield-shaped stones. He also carries with him a *staff of swarming insects*, an oaken staff carved with the images of flies. It currently contains 20 charges; each time a charge is spent one of the carved flies disappears. The staff's range is 100 feet (if Jeremias is at 4th level) or 120 feet (if Jeremias is at 6th level). It produces either 100 or 120 swarming flies that inflict either 10 or 12 hit points of damage before vanishing.

Spells at Level 4 (reversed):

1st—*cause light wounds (cure light wounds), command, curse (bless), detect magic, faerie fire.*

2nd—*hold person, obscurement, silence 15' radius, wyvern watch.*

Additional Spells at Level 6 (reversed):

2nd—*enthrall.*

3rd—*cause blindness or deafness (cure blindness or deafness), feign death.*

Special Abilities: Jeremias' telepathic link to the imp, Kwelkoth, enables him to see through the imp's eyes, and to use its infravision.

The imp conveys both a 25% magical resistance upon Jeremias, and the ability to regenerate 1 hit point per round. When it is within range, Jeremias functions as a 6th-level priest with 38 hit points.

If the imp is not within range, Jeremias functions as a 4th-level priest with 29 hit points.

Should the imp be killed, Jeremias loses four levels of experience, and becomes a mere 1st-level priest. (Use the Temple Priest statistics to represent Jeremias' reduced abilities.)

Dominique Nagy, drow f, P4: AC 7 (+3 from three *ioun stones*); MV 12 (unencumbered); hp 25; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4+2 (+2 adamantine dagger); SA spells; SD spells; SW bright light; MR 56%, +2 bonus to saves vs. magic, +6 bonus to saves vs. fire; SZ M (5'); ML elite (13); AL CE; XP 975.

Notes: As a drow elf, Dominique can cast the following spells once per day: *dancing lights, faerie fire, darkness, clairvoyance, detect lie, suggestion*, and *dispel magic*.

When confronted with bright light (when within the radius of a *light* or *continual light* spell, for example), Dominique loses 2 points from her Dexterity and attacks with a –2 penalty. Victims of her spells receive a +2 bonus to any saving throws they make against her magic. If the victim is also within the radius of the spell, Dominique suffers an additional –1 penalty to her attacks, while the victim gains an additional +1 bonus to saving throws against her magic. If she's unable to counter bright light with a *darkness* spell, there is a 75% chance that Dominique will leave the area.

Because she serves the gods of death, Dominique has two granted powers. Twice per day, she can use the power *Inspire fear*, which is similar to the 4th-level wizard spell *fear*. She can also control the undead; use the Turning Undead table in the *Realm of Terror* book.

In addition, as a priestess of Kiaransalee, Dominique has the ability to use the granted power *animate dead* to raise up a maximum of one corpse per day.

S 13, D 13, Co 12, I 15, W 13, C 9

Appearance: Dominique has midnight-black skin, pointed ears, and moon-white hair worn in a single braid. She wears the gray robes of her order over a black velvet tunic, and is shod in low black slippers. A silver ring on her left thumb holds a large black stone engraved with the image of a curved dagger, symbol of the drow goddess Kiaransalee (details on this goddess can be found in the book, *Monster Mythology*). Three *ioun stones* orbit her constantly.

Personality: Dominique comes from a realm outside the Domain of Dread, but has been living in Darkon for several years. Like all Darkonians, she believes she was born in this domain. The one thing she retained from her original homeland was a fervent worship of Kiaransalee, drow goddess of vengeance and the undead. Like her goddess, Dominique is always making

secret plans for exacting vengeance upon those who have slighted her or her deity.

Magical Items: Although they do not radiate magic, Dominique's tunic and slippers function as if they were a *cloak of elvenkind* and *boots of elvenkind*, giving her a 75% chance to blend with shadows and become nearly invisible. The tunic is fire-resistant, providing a +6 bonus to all saving throws having to do with fire.

Spells (reversed):

1st—*command, curse (bless), darkness (light), detect magic.*

2nd—*aid, enthrall.*

Burlin Netherwood, gm, P3: AC 10; MV 12 (unencumbered); hp 21; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg blindness (blowpipe); SA spells; SD spells; SZ S (3'); ML steady (12); AL CE; XP 175.

Note: Because he serves the gods of death, Burlin has two granted powers. Twice per day, he can use the power *inspire fear*, which is similar to the 4th-level wizard spell *fear*. He can also control the undead; use the Turning Undead table in the *Realm of Terror* book.

In addition, as a priest of Urdlen, Burlin has the ability to cast the spell *stinking cloud* three times per day.

S 10, D 13, Co 17, I 13, W 10, C 4

Appearance: Burlin is a scruffy-looking gnome with uncombed hair, a matted beard, and a frayed, ash robe. The faint odor of rotten eggs clings to him as a result of his granted ability to cast the *stinking cloud* spell.

Personality: Burlin is a thoroughly nasty individual who delights in death and bloodletting. He has turned his gnomish tinkering talents toward the creation of fiendishly clever, miniaturized execution devices, and enjoys testing these on small animals. He worships the evil gnomish god Urdlen, and dedicates the blood he spills to that deity (details on this god can be found in the book, *Monster Mythology*).

Magical Items: Burlin wears a *ring of animal friendship*, which he uses to capture animals for his experiments. Burlin's weapon is a blowpipe loaded with *powder of the black veil* (described in the *Tome of Magic*). This magical black powder causes temporary blindness unless the victim can make a successful saving throw vs. spell. Burlin carries the powder in a pouch, in 12 paper-wrapped doses that are ready to shoot. The blowpipe has a range of just five feet.

Spells (reversed):

1st—*cause light wounds (cure light wounds), curse (bless).*

2nd—*hold person.*

Temple Priests, hm/f, P1 (12): AC 9; MV 12 (unencumbered); hp 8 each; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (dagger); SA spells; SZ M (5'5–6'); ML steady (11); Int avg (12); AL NE; XP 35 each.

Notes: As followers of the gods of death, these priests can control the undead; use the Turning Undead table in the *Realm of Terror* book.

Magical Items: Shared among these priests are a *wand of enemy detection* (35 charges), two *+1 daggers*, three *potions of healing*, and a *necklace of strangulation* (presented to the intended victim as a gift of "prayer beads").

Spells (reversed):

1st—*cause light wounds (cure light wounds).*

The Kargat

Boris Gjorkin, werebear m (Lycanthrope): AC 2; MV 9; HD 7+3; hp 42; THAC0 13; #AT 1 or 3; Dmg 1 + energy drain (*blood blade*) or 1–3/1–3/2d4 (claw/claw/bite); SA hug; SD magical or cold-forged iron weapons to hit; SW belladonna; SZ L (6'6" tall); ML elite (14); AL CN; XP 1,400.

Notes: If both of the werebear's claw attacks are successful, Boris hugs for an additional 2d8 points of damage. Within the city, Boris is unable to summon bears.

S 19, D 15, Co 16, I 12, W 8, C 13

Appearance: Boris is a hulking giant of a man with a low forehead, thick eyebrows that give him a glowering appearance, and muscular, hairy arms. Boris does not so much walk as lumber. He appears ponderous and slow, but can move with great speed when necessary.

Personality: Boris gives the appearance of being gruff and dim-witted but is, in fact, of average disposition and intelligence. He always thinks things through carefully before acting, often cracking his knuckles as he stands and ponders a question in silence. Due to his chaotic nature, it is impossible to predict what his answer might be in any situation. He loves to eat and can pack away an incredible

amount of food. He sleeps soundly; even alarm bells do not disturb his slumber.

Magical Items: Boris carries with him a pouch containing twelve dried berries. When eaten, these have the same effect as berries treated with a *goodberry* spell. He also has a chunk of magical honeycomb that acts as a *philter of love*. It is enclosed in a small metal box engraved (in the Vistani language) with the words: "Sweets for your sweetheart."

Lars Snegrin, wereboar m (Lycanthrope): AC 4; MV 12; HD 5+2; hp 31; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1 + energy drain (*blood blade*) or 2d6 (tusks); SD magical or oaken weapons to hit; SW camphor; SZ M (5'8" tall); ML elite (13); AL N; XP 650.

S 17, D 14, Co 18, I 7, W 9, C 6

Appearance: Lars' gray hair is so closely cropped that it seems more like stubble. He has a wide, flared nose, crooked teeth, and a face that is stippled with scar tissue. A scar at the edge of his lip pulls his mouth into a perpetual sneer.

Personality: Lars is a bully, plain and simple. Too slow-witted to inflict emotional abuse, he instead relies upon his fists to satisfy his sadistic impulses. He often interprets casual remarks as insults and responds accordingly, but with violence.

Magical Items: Lars carries a battered and dented magical tin whistle that has some of the properties of a set of *pipes of pain*. When played it emits a shrill, off-key whistling sound that causes intense pain and inflicts 1d4 points of damage per round. This noise does not affect Lars; over the years he has developed a natural immunity to the whistle's magical effects.

Francine Pavlina, wererat f (Lycanthrope): AC 6; MV 12; HD 3+1; hp 15; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1 + energy drain (*blood blade*); SA surprise; SD magical weapons to hit; SW alcohol; SZ M (4'8" tall); ML steady (12); AL LE; XP 270.

Notes: Francine's strength is that she can be wounded only by magical weapons. Her weakness is that she is vulnerable to alcohol. Ingesting even an ounce of it will kill her instantly. She can summon and control 2d6 giant rats at will. They arrive in 1d4+1 rounds after being summoned.

S 10, D 17, Co 12, I 15, W 12, C 10

Appearance: Francine is a small woman whose eyes seem to be always squinting behind thick glass spectacles. She is thin and wiry and wears her hair pulled back in a severe bun.

Personality: Francine seems perpetually nervous and moves with quick, sudden gestures. She speaks rapidly in a high-pitched voice and often repeats herself.

Magical Items: Francine wears a *ring of invisibility*, which she uses to spy on priests and fellow Kargat members alike.

Pasha Bella, weretiger f (Lycanthrope): AC 3; MV 12; HD 6+2; hp 26; THAC0 15; #AT 1 or 3; Dmg 1 + energy drain (*blood blade*) or 1d4/1d4/2d6 (punch/punch/bite); SA rake; SD magical or obsidian-tipped weapons to hit; SW ginseng; SZ M (5'10" tall); ML elite (13); AL NE; XP 975.

Notes: Pasha has the option of raking with her claws, rather than punching. A rake attack inflicts 1d4+1 points of damage.

S 18, D 18, Co 16, I 12, W 8, C 13 (18)

Appearance: Pasha is a stunningly beautiful woman with dark, lustrous skin and long brown hair that is streaked with highlights of gold. She dresses in elegant silks and enjoys wearing gold rings and bracelets.

Personality: Pasha moves with fluid grace and always seems perfectly poised. Her manners are impeccable—but they hide a cold heart, for Pasha is unable to care about anyone but herself and her two newborn cubs (see **Pasha's Secret**, page 44). She is utterly without compassion and will always act in her own best interest.

Magical Items: Pasha is wearing a *ring of human influence*, which boosts her Charisma to 18 when dealing with humanoids. She can also (once per day each) use the ring to *charm* or cast a *suggestion* spell upon an unsuspecting victim. (Normal saving throws apply.)

The Ebon Fold

Despite the defeat of their order in the adventure *Death Unchained*, a handful of the assassins who belonged to the Ebon Fold survived. Two of them made it as far as Nartok and now have taken up residence in the Temple of the Eternal Order.

These Ebon Fold members were originally

normal mortal thieves who died at the hands of the Talons of Falkovnia by being impaled on stakes. While they were brought back to life by the necromancer Ladislas Sintesti, their former master, the spell he used did not truly heal all their wounds. Their bodies work perfectly well, but the injuries they sustained at death merely stopped bleeding, they did not heal over. As a result, each member of the Ebon Fold has a fist-sized hole that pierces his torso.

Originally fearless servants of evil, Vilna and Jurgen became demoralized at the loss of their master. They now follow the orders of the Kargat, but only grudgingly, for the Kargat have not promised them eternal life as their former master did.

They still carry with them the magical daggers that originally were known as *death shards*. These crystal-bladed daggers have undergone a transformation, and now function as *blood blades* (see page 21). Once Vilna and Jurgen are alerted to the fact that the blood inside these daggers can be used to increase their energy levels (hit points and hit dice, but not the associated skills) they will likely betray their new masters and seek to use the *blood blades* for their own benefit.

Vilna von Pessack, hm, T3: AC 7 (Dexterity bonus); MV 12 (unencumbered); hp 11; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1 + energy drain (*blood blade*); SA backstab; SZ M (5'10"); ML unsteady (6); AL NE; XP 120.

PP 20	OL 15	F/RT 05	MS 45
HS 35	DN 15	CW 60	RL 05

Notes: When attacking from behind, Vilna has a THAC0 of 15. In addition, the target's shield and Dexterity bonuses to AC are negated.

S 14, D 17, Co 12, I 17, W 14, C 17.

Appearance: Vilna is a handsome, charming man who dresses in elegant clothing, including a black hat and cape.

Personality: Vilna's death and resurrection have driven him mad. He is delusional and believes himself to be a vampire. He often swoops around a room with his cape outstretched, insisting that he is a bat. He also likes to bite his victims on the neck.

Jurgen Yarlsboro, hm, T3: AC 7 (leather armor); MV 12 (unencumbered); hp 10; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1 + energy drain (*blood blade*); SA backstab; SZ M (5'6"); ML unsteady (6); AL CE; XP 120.

PP 10	OL 10	F/RT 05	MS 25
HS 30	DN 15	CW 60	RL 05

Notes: When attacking from behind, Jurgen has a THAC0 of 15. In addition, the target's shield and Dexterity bonuses to AC are negated.

S 16, D 11, Co 10, I 1, W 12, C 10.

Appearance: Jurgen is an unkempt individual, with scruffy clothes and uncombed hair. He is short but muscular.

Personality: Jurgen's death and resurrection have driven him mad. He suffers from hallucinations, and sees maggots everywhere; he is constantly going through the motions of plucking them off his skin and out of his food.

The Infernal Machine

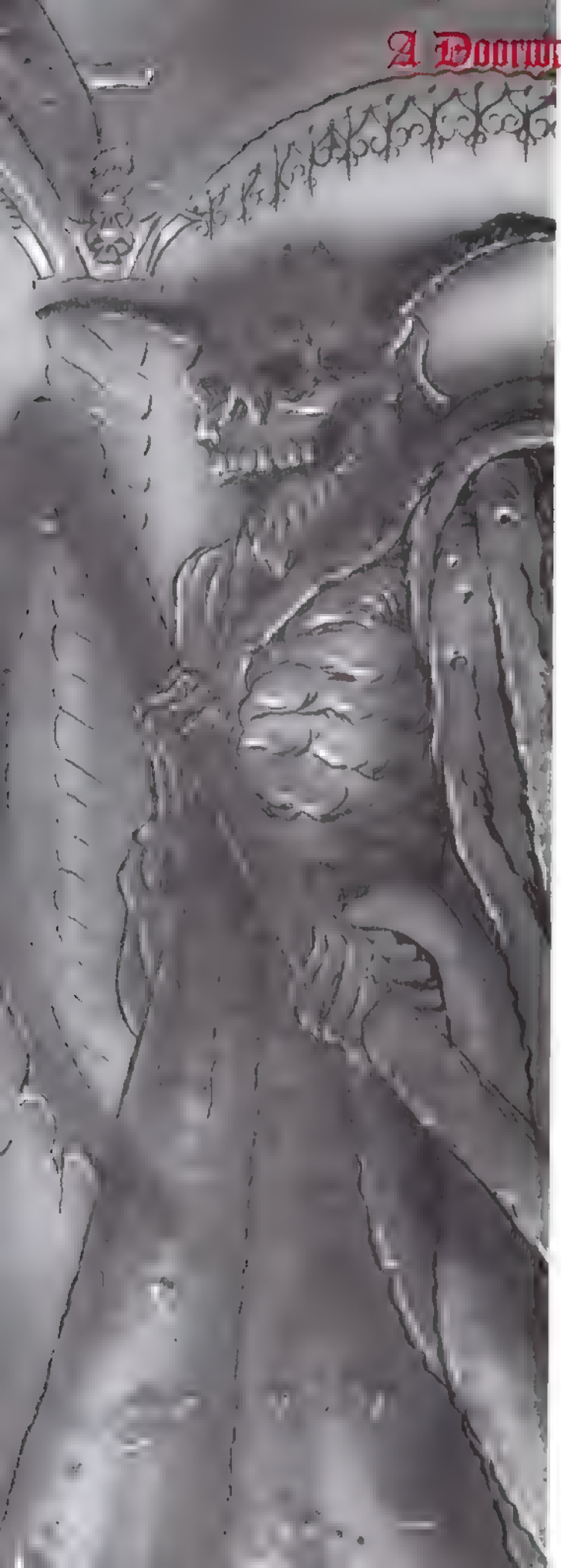
In *Death Unchained*, the heroes encountered a secret society (the Ebon Fold) whose members were using magical daggers to steal life energy and channel it back to a crystal skull. A letter within the lair of the Ebon Fold indicated that this skull, once full, was to be delivered by a courier in Stangengrad to someone named Lowellyn Dachine.

That skull was one of six that were created to power an experimental magical device that Lowellyn has constructed (using plans drawn up by his master, Azalin) in the Temple of the Eternal Order in Nartok.

As this adventure begins, the *infernal machine* has at last been completed. Five crystal skulls have been delivered to the temple by other agents of the Kargat. The loss of the skull from Falkovnia, however, has set the experiment back a little. Now the Kargat at the temple (and the two surviving Ebon Fold members) must work overtime to steal the additional life force necessary to fully charge the *infernal machine*.

The life force is stolen using *blood blades* and is deposited in crystal skulls within the temple. These skulls are magically connected to a golden coffin at the heart of the temple. As soon as enough energy has been stored within the skulls, Lowellyn will lock himself in the coffin and activate the *infernal machine*, transforming himself into a powerful creature that is similar to a lich in many ways.

The *infernal machine* may be an



awesomely powerful magical device, but it is merely a prototype for a larger magical device currently under construction in Il Aluk. The lich lord Azalin plans to use this more powerful device to transform himself into a demilich. He hopes that this will allow him to escape the confines of the Demiplane of Dread.

Although the *infernal machine* is located within their temple, the priests of the Eternal Order do not know its true purpose; they do not even know about the crystal skulls. Lowellyn's Kargat minions do know about the skulls, but they know precious little about the *machine*, only that it is extremely powerful, highly magical, and reserved for Lowellyn's use exclusively. If something were to happen to Lowellyn, however, they just might try to use the *machine* to gain power for themselves.

The disruption of temple routine and the officious, authoritarian manner of the Kargat have earned the ire of the priests, who have their own agenda to fulfill (lining their pockets). Only the fact that the Lowellyn is himself a priest of the Eternal Order is causing the other priests to submit to this intrusion.

The Crystal Skulls

The five magical crystal skulls that serve as the repositories for the life force stolen by the *blood blades* are hidden within the Temple of the Eternal Order in Nartok. Each has been placed atop a statue whose head has been removed. This handiwork was then concealed using a powerful spell (devised by Azalin for just this purpose), which gives the illusion that the statue was whole and still in its original form. This illusion is permanent. It cannot be dispelled and is does not disappear when the illusionary "head" of the statue is touched or struck.

Characters with Supra-Genius Intelligence (19 or better) are not affected by the illusion and can see the crystal skulls. The skulls can also be seen by characters who use magical aids such as a *gem of seeing* or the spell *true seeing*. Only those characters who have been told that the "head" of the statue is nothing more than an illusion masking a crystal skull can attempt to disbelieve the illusion that hides it. Even then, the attempt to disbelieve is made with a –2 penalty.

The statues were felt to offer the safest hiding places for the crystal skulls, since only priests of the Eternal Order are permitted to enter the alcoves that hold them; the public may approach an alcove to pray before the statues, but may not pass through its archway. Now that the crystal skulls are in place, not even the priests are allowed to approach the statues, a situation that greatly vexes the priests.

All of the statues inside the alcoves are similar in appearance. When the heroes first inspect one, read the players the following description:

> The alcove holds a statue of fiendish appearance; a horned, skeletal head and gaunt rib cage that is carved so that it appears to be draped in dull black robes. The eyes are set with glittering glass and seem to follow your every move, and the hands hold a raised, gilded scythe that seems ready to slice through any who dare invade this unholy sanctuary.

If the heroes look through a *gem of seeing* at any of the statues that bears a crystal skull (or manage to disbelieve or counteract the illusion placed upon it), read the following to the players:

> The head of the statue disappears like mist. In its place is a glittering, crystal skull with deep eye sockets. The skull is filled with a bright red liquid that sloshes gently inside it as if stirred by an invisible hand.

The life energies stolen by the *blood blades* are deposited inside a crystal skull by inserting the shaft of a *blood blade* into either of the skull's eye sockets, which are deep enough to accommodate the full length of the blade. (The illusion makes it look as though the blade is being inserted into one of the statue's eyes.) The transfer of life force takes only one round, after which the *blood blade* is empty and ready to steal more life force.

Each of the skulls is protected with an *avoidance* spell. Only creatures holding a *blood blade* may freely approach one of the skulls. Any other living creature attempting to touch one of the skulls must first make a successful saving throw vs. spell to approach within one foot of it.

Note: Since the skull is fixed to the heavy statue and does not move away from the character, creatures attempting to move within one foot of a crystal skull will be thrown forcefully away by a magical force.

Should the skull be touched, an *alarm* spell is triggered. The alarm can be heard throughout the nave and its adjoining rooms, but cannot be heard in the rest of the temple. It continues pealing for four turns—or until a *blood blade* is inserted in the eye of the skull, an act that immediately silences (and resets) the spell.

Each skull is also protected by a third spell. These spells have a permanent duration, and are triggered when the skull is touched or moved in any way.

Skull 1 (Alcove A2) is protected by the spell *burning hands*, which produces a fan-shaped flame that inflicts 1d3+20 points of damage to anyone standing in the alcove. A successful saving throw vs. spell reduces this to half damage.

Skull 2 (Alcove A3) is protected by the spell *chill touch*, which inflicts 1d4 points of damage and reduces the victim's Strength by 1. The lost Strength will return at a rate of 1 point per hour. A successful saving throw vs. spell causes the duration of the Strength loss to be halved; the point of Strength returns in half an hour.

Skull 3 (Alcove A5) is protected by the spell *shocking grasp*, which inflicts 1d8+15 points of electrical damage. A successful saving throw vs. spell reduces this to half damage.

Skull 4 (Alcove A6) is protected by the spell *blindness*. The victim is struck with a permanent blindness that can only be cured by a *dispel magic* spell. As a result, the victim suffers a –4 penalty to his attack rolls, while opponents gain a +4 bonus to attack rolls. A successful saving throw vs. spell results in the victim suffering reduced eyesight rather than complete blindness. He can see dimly and suffers only a –2 penalty to attack rolls, while opponents gain a +2 bonus to their attack rolls.

Skull 5 (Alcove A8) is protected by the spell *feign death*. Since the victim touched the skull, he is deemed to be a "willing victim" and falls into a deathlike trance for 1 hour. (The Dungeon Master should tell the player that his character will die unless a successful saving throw vs. spell is made. The DM should then make the saving throw in secret and simply tell the player that the roll failed regardless of the actual result. That way, all the heroes will be fooled into thinking that the "death" is real.) The deathlike trance can be negated using a *dispel magic* spell.

Finally, each of the skulls is immune to destructive spells and magical effects (except for those specifically described below) by a spell created by Azalin specifically to protect these crystal skulls. The spell works the same way as a permanent *globe of invulnerability* except that it has the ability to prevent even high-level spells from penetrating. The skulls have also been made impervious to damage from weapons, even magical weapons.

To approach and tamper with a crystal skull, a series of four *dispel magic* spells are required: one to negate the *avoidance* spell; one to negate the *alarm* spell; one to negate the third protective spell; and one to eliminate the magic that protects the skull from magical or mundane attack. The first three castings permanently dispel the first three protective spells; the fourth *dispel magic*, however, merely drops the skull's magical defenses for 1d4 rounds.

During this time, the skull becomes vulnerable to attack. It may be broken open by inflicting 12 or more points of damage to it, or by appropriate spells (a *shatter* spell, for example). If the heroes don't succeed in breaking the skull open in time, the magical protection against spells and mundane attacks resumes. Another *dispel magic* casting will be required to negate this effect for another 1d4 rounds.

When a crystal skull is broken open, it shatters apart explosively, inflicting 1d6 points of damage to anyone within a 10-foot radius (this means anyone within the alcove that houses it). At the same time, any *blood blades* within range also shatter. Any character holding one of these weapons when it shatters suffers cuts to his hand from the broken shards, resulting in an additional 1d4 points of damage.

The life energies trapped inside the skull (and any shattered daggers) are lost when the blood inside them is splattered in every direction. Truly desperate characters may try to lap up this blood from the floor, but they may, at the DM's discresion, suffer disease (from ingesting dirt) or internal injury and peritonitis (from swallowing tiny shards of crystal) as a result. They will also have to make a powers check to avoid the repercussions of drinking blood, as described on page 22.

If a *rod of cancellation* is used against a crystal skull, the skull saves as an artifact. The rod has no effect on a roll of 3 or higher on 1d20, and will never have any effect against it. (The same rod may be tried on other crystal skulls, however.) Should the saving throw fail and the rod drain the skull of its magic, the explosive results described above occur.

A *wand of negation* can be used in the same manner as a *dispel magic* spell against a crystal skull. Each charge expended has a 75% chance of stripping the skull of one of its magical protections.

A *sphere of annihilation* will completely destroy a crystal skull.

Among the Flock

Below are two encounters to be used during the services at Nartok's Temple of the Eternal Order. The first merely describes the interior of the Temple as it would appear to the heroes as they walk among the regular worshipers. The second is an encounter with the Kargat which takes place during the service (and which will give them some clue that something extremely unusual is going on in the Temple).

The Midnight Mass

On evenings of worship, when the statues' dirge peals out, the residents of Nartok drop what they are doing and head for the temple. Many are able to resist the magical summons, but several hundred will heed the call.

The heroes may succumb to the *suggestion* or may join the worshippers of their own free will. When they enter the temple, read the following:

The people of the city file silently up the weathered steps and into the temple. As they pass through the double doors whose frames are carved to resemble gigantic mouths, they seem to be swallowed whole by the hungry black building.

Just inside the double doors stand three stone fonts filled with water. The sides of the fonts have been carved into a twisted mass of humanoid creatures who claw and scrabble at one another as if trying to climb to the top of the font. The water inside is murky and reddish brown, as if fouled by mud. Occasionally a bubble rises through it, erupting on the surface with a faint belch that emits a smell reminiscent of clotted blood.

Each of the people filing into the temple drops a single silver coin into the font as he passes by. These sink without trace.

Each of the fonts in the temple holds unholy water. This foul substance, made from blood-saturated mud, will inflict 1d6+1 points of damage upon any paladin who touches it.

Each font also holds hundreds of silver coins that can be removed by any character daring enough to stick an arm into the water but non-evil characters who touch the water (or who are splashed by it) must make a saving throw vs. poison. Unless this roll is successful, that character's skin either turns an odd color, puckers up as if scarred, or sprouts coarse black hairs wherever the water touched it. This effect can only be removed with a *remove curse* spell, and these stigmata will alert the priests to the attempted thievery of the temple's tithes.

A little further inside the temple, just past corridors that lead away to the right and left, are carved wooden screens. These have been inlaid with ivory to form a scene in which skeletons rise from their graves. So realistic are these life-sized skeletons that their eyes seem to follow the viewer. Their outstretched hands seem ready to grasp at the clothing of any unwary passersby.

The nave of the temple, the wide aisle and open area under the central dome, is filled with shadows and the whispering sounds of shuffling feet. To either side of the aisle is a row of columns that glow with light. Although the illumination is welcome, the columns themselves are ghastly. Each has been constructed from human skulls, arranged one on top of the other to form a gruesome cylinder.

Inside each skull, a squat yellow candle burns. Its dim yellow light shines fitfully out through the eye sockets and nose of the skull, flickering as the crowd passes by. The candles emit a faint but foul odor, vaguely reminiscent of the smell of burning flesh.

The worshippers seem to be avoiding a number of wide rectangular stones that have been set into the floor. Each of these stones bears an inscription that the passage of time has long since blurred beyond legibility. Judging from the shape of the stones and the respectful berth given them by the people, these are sepulchers, resting places for the dead. It is impossible to be certain, given the scuffing of so many feet, but you think you hear the faint sounds of something scrabbling at the underside of one of these stones.

Half of the sepulchers are empty, but the others each hold a single skeleton (the DM should decide which sepluchers are empty and which are occupied). These undead creatures can be controlled by any priest of the Eternal Order who makes a successful control undead roll (similar to a turning undead roll).

The priests often refer to these sepulchers in their services, using them as examples of how the dead are always seeking to arise from their tombs and trade places with the living. They tell the congregation that the corpses are "sealed" inside their temple tombs by the "power of faith." This is useful in convincing the lay worshipper that the priests of the Eternal Order really do have the power to hold back the Hour of Ascension.

At the Dungeon Master's discretion, one of the skeletons may rise out of its sepulcher and attack the crowd during the service. The priests make a big show of driving it back into its tomb (in fact controlling it and ordering it back below). This "triumph over the powers of death" is worked into the evening's service, a well-choreographed minor miracle, courtesy of the priests of the Eternal Order.

A number of black, wrought-iron candelabras illuminate the area under the temple's central dome. Each is studded with spikes, upon which squat yellow candles have been impaled. Most of the light, however, is provided by the rays of the setting sun, which slants in through the stained glass windows of the west transept.

Five large windows decorate the rounded wall underneath this side dome. Four of these windows depict the same scene: figures of screaming humans, elves and dwarves who are being attacked by skeletal hands that have emerged from the earth underfoot. The fifth, central window depicts a priest, hands outstretched, forcing the dead back under the ground by the power of his faith. The rays of the setting sun cast an eerie halo about this figure, shining through its eyes and turning them the color of blood.

Overhead, the interior of the central dome is painted with what look like black, boiling clouds, pierced by jagged streaks of lightning. The clouds form subtle patterns that give the impression of faces that stare down at those below with mouths distended into grimaces and howls.

The focal point of the nave is a wide stone altar that looks as though it has been pieced together from the shattered remnants of many tombstones. Across the front, a single line of text has been deeply inscribed: "We claim the dead, lest the dead claim us."

Behind the altar stands a woman with black skin and stark white hair, wearing a priest's gray robe. Beside her, standing on top of the altar and surveying the assembled worshippers with his hands on his hips, is a gnome who is similarly garbed. The face of each is smeared with a chalky white substance that gives their skin the pallor of death.

Services begin at sunset and last until midnight, when Bishop Jeremias Grimshaw arrives to lead the faithful in a prayer that supposedly keeps the Hour of Ascension at bay. The service as a whole is about three hours long, and is conducted by the twelve lesser priests under the direction of the drow elf Dominique Nagy (see page 30) and the gnome Burlin Netherwood (see page 31).

While these two lead the congregation in the singing of mournful hymns and the recitation of prayers, the other priests stand in front of the screens leading to the rear nave or circulate amongst the worshippers. Between the prayers and songs, the faithful are urged to pay their tithe of one silver piece and to approach the altar and lay upon it any magical items they have for "destruction" by the priests. (After the last of the congregation leaves, these magical items will be collected for storage in one of the temple treasuries.)

During the lengthy service the nave of the temple is packed with people. Since there are no pews in the temple, they must all stand or shuffle about for the entire ritual; it is almost impossible for the fourteen priests in attendance to keep an eye on everyone. It should be relatively easy for the heroes to slip away and explore other parts of the temple, either returning before the service ends or else hiding until after the service is over. Attempts to slip through the locked double doors that lead to the rear nave, however, will be noticed by the priests, who will prevent the heroes from proceeding.

Until the service has reached its midnight climax, Bishop Jeremias Grimshaw remains in his chamber (Room H). Lowellyn Dachine is in the rear nave (Area K), inspecting the *infernal machine*.

A Stab in the Dark

The Kargat officers are also busy during the service. Like the priests, their goal is to use the congregation to further their own ends. In this case, however, the worshippers pay with their lives rather than with a silver coin.

During the service, officers of the Kargat mingle with the crowd. They quietly single out victims whom they escort, one by one, to a quiet area (Room B6) for the purpose of "answering a few questions about a police matter." Here, each victim is dispatched by Ebon Fold members, Vilna von Pessack and Jurgen Yarlsboro, who use their *blood blades* to make backstabbing attacks.

After three NPC worshippers have been thus dispatched, one of the heroes is selected to be the next victim. Read the following to the player of that hero:

A hulking giant of a man with a low forehead, thick eyebrows, and muscular, hairy arms pushes his way toward you through the crowd. Glowering at you, he lays a heavy hand on your shoulder.

"Come with me," he growls. "I want to ask you some questions. A murder has been committed."

The large man is Boris Gjorkin (see page 31). He doesn't offer any explanation, just insists that the hero come with him. If the hero refuses to accompany him, Boris identifies himself as an officer of the Kargat. If the hero still refuses to come along quietly, Boris is visibly surprised. He's used to fearful compliance on the part of his victims.

Boris is savvy enough not to cause a scene in the middle of a temple service. If the hero puts up too much resistance or if the other heroes step in, he apologizes and says he must have mistaken the hero for someone else.

Realizing that the hero is a potential troublemaker, Boris asks one of the other Kargat officers to deal with the problem. A short time later (unless the hero has slipped away from the service) Pasha Bella (see page 32) tries to *charm* the hero into accompanying her to Room B6.

If this doesn't work, the Kargat officer Francine Pavlina (see page 32) approaches under cover of invisibility and stabs the hero with her *blood blade*. Even though she becomes visible when attacking, on the next round she slips back into the tightly packed crowd of worshippers, using her magical ring to become invisible once more. She repeats this process until she herself is injured.

The targeted hero might accompany one of the Kargat officers to Room B6, or the heroes might instead observe Boris leading an NPC victim there. When this happens, read the following to the players (modifying the description to fit the situation):

You follow the lumbering giant of a man (the stunningly beautiful woman) back toward the main entrance of the temple. He (she) turns to the right, down a side corridor, and opens a door in one wall. It leads to an austere-looking bedroom, dimly lit by candles that are guttering low in large wrought-iron

candelabras. A corpse lies on the floor near one bed, and the smell of blood is thick in the air.

"This is what I wanted to talk to you about," the man (woman) says. "A murder has been committed. I'm hoping that you can help me find the killer."

The Dungeon Master will have to tailor the description of what happens next, according to whether it is a hero or an NPC worshipper who is to be the fourth victim.

If an NPC worshipper is the chosen victim, that individual enters the room and Boris follows and then closes the door. The heroes hear the sounds of a scuffle. By the time they can react, the victim is dead.

If a hero is the chosen victim, what happens next depends upon whether or not the hero moves into the room to inspect the body. If so, the Kargat officer steps in behind and closes the door, and the two Ebon Fold members immediately spring out of the shadows to backstab with their *blood blades*. If the hero refuses to enter the room, Boris (or Pasha) changes into werebear (or weretiger) form and shoves the hero inside.

There are a total of three bodies in this room (or four, if the Ebon Fold members have just killed an NPC). They resemble the Romenza corpses found earlier. All have skin that is a smooth, glistening red, marked with several coin-sized punctures. If touched, the gelatinous skin sloughs off, emits a foul stench, and disintegrates, leaving only bones (as described on page 15). As before, the sight is cause for a horror check.

If the heroes seem about to overcome the two Ebon Fold members, Boris (or Pasha) attempts to escape by slipping out through a secret door in one wall. If he (or she) is able to escape back into the crowd of worshippers that pack the nave of the temple, the other Kargat officers will receive a description of the strangers who dared to stand up to them. The next time any of the Kargat spot these heroes, they will immediately know them to be enemies.

As a result of this encounter, the heroes may recover as many as three of the *blood blades* and should be able to deduce that the two Ebon Fold members whom they followed to this temple have other, more powerful allies.

After Hours In The Temple

The encounters that follow are designed to introduce the heroes to some of the inhabitants of the temple and to allow the heroes to discover magical items and other objects that will be useful during the climax of this adventure (see **The Golden Coffin**, page 48). They are assumed to occur at some time other than during one of the masses, either after the worshippers have left or on a day when there are no services. These encounters also provide clues that will help the heroes to discover the true purpose of the *blood blades*, the crystal skulls, and the *infernal machine* itself.

The heroes can slip in and out of the temple as many times as they are able, taking refuge between explorations somewhere in the city of Nartok. They can either attempt to sneak into the temple whenever they like or enter with the local worshipers every fourth night, when a mass is held.

As long as the heroes are careful, they should eventually be able to learn what is really going on inside the temple. (This adventure requires that the heroes use their heads, rather than charge blindly into the temple and take on the multitude of evil NPCs who inhabit it.)

Should the heroes need motivation, Vito pleads with them to remember the fate that befell his family, begging them to expunge this evil at its source. He continues to tell fortunes for the heroes, providing them with clues, thus the Dungeon Master should endeavor to keep him alive. Vito will accompany the heroes into the temple, but won't take any foolish chances.

As the heroes explore the Temple of the Eternal Order, the Dungeon Master is reminded that this complex is inhabited by 22 people. These NPCs must leave the temple to eat, thus not all may be on hand at any given moment, but most will be (and if things get violent they can easily call for city militia to back them up). The heroes therefore cannot wander through the temple brazenly; they will have to be sneaky. Their best option is either to hide whenever a priest or Kargat officer passes by or, perhaps, try to pass themselves off as temple priests, Kargat officers, or Ebon Fold members. They probably won't fool the real members of the group they're

impersonating, but they may fool those of the opposing faction. (It would not be as difficult to trick a Kargat officer into believing that they are priests, for example).

The only "wandering monsters" in this section are the occupants of the temple. Each turn that the heroes spend exploring the temple, the heroes have a 20% chance (non-cumulative) of encountering one of the following NPCs (roll 1d10):

1) Bishop Jeremias Grimshaw
2) Lowellyn Dachine
3) Dominique Nagy
4) Burlin Netherwood
5) Lars Snegrin or Boris Gjorkin
6) Pasha Bella or Francine Pavlina
7–10) 1d4 1st-level Temple Priests

If the heroes are spotted by an NPC, the Dungeon Master will have to ad-lib the encounter, modifying the reaction of the NPC according to the appearance and actions of the heroes. Remember that each faction of the NPCs has its own agenda.

The priests would like to find out what the Kargat are up to and sabotage their experiment; getting the heroes to do this would provide the "plausible deniability" they need to get away with it.

The Kargat officers (except for Lowellyn Dachine, who has more important things on his mind) want to find the temple's treasuries and loot the valuables they hold. They will appeal to the heroes' greed and suggest a partnership, then stab them in the back later—literally, with a *blood blade*.

While the occupants of the temple can be found anywhere, the most likely place for an NPC to be encountered is, of course, in his own room. There is a 30% chance that the heroes will encounter the following people whenever they enter the rooms listed below (see poster map for room locations).

Sleeping Quarters:

Room B1	Lowellyn Dachine (Kargat)
Room B2	Boris Gjorkin, Lars Snegrin, and Francine Pavlina (Kargat)
Room B3	2 1st-level Priests
Room B4	2 1st-level Priests
Room B5	2 1st-level Priests
Room B6	Jurgen Yarlsboro and Vilna von Pessack (Ebon Fold)
Room D1	Burlin Netherwood (Priest)
Room D2	2 1st-level Priests
Room D3	Pasha Bella (Kargat)
Room D4	Dominique Nagy (Priest)
Room D5	2 1st-level Priests
Room D6	2 1st-level Priests
Room H	Jeremias Grimshaw (Bishop)

In addition to these random encounters, a number of set encounters follow. While each places one or more NPCs in a particular location, the Dungeon Master should feel free to replace one NPC with another (especially if the one described has already been eliminated) or to move the encounter to another area of the temple.

The furnishings of the temple are sparse and functional: rough-hewn wooden tables and chairs and a few simple beds with cotton mattresses and woollen blankets. The rooms are illuminated by candles that are set into black wrought-iron candelabras that stand about chest-high. The floor and walls are stone, occasionally covered by a dark carpet or wall hangings embroidered with various images of death (tombstones, skeletons, sickles, shrouded figures, etc.).

The ceilings of the nave and rear nave (the main open areas of the temple) are 50 feet high. The central dome adds another 40 feet to this height, while the smaller side and rear domes add 30 feet to the ceiling height. The rooms and alcoves all have 20-foot-high ceilings.

All of the locked doors (both interior and exterior) can be opened by the keys carried by the priests. Each of Kargat officers carries a similar key. The Ebon Fold members do not have keys.

Blood Offering

This encounter can be set at any of the alcoves that contains a statue whose head has been replaced with a crystal skull. It assumes that the heroes are watching from a place of concealment. Read the players the following:

A moment ago, the nave was empty. Suddenly, as if she materialized out of thin air, a small woman has appeared. She peers quickly around through thick spectacles, then makes her way hurriedly to one of the alcoves in which a

statue of the death god is housed.

Approaching the statue, she draws a dagger whose crystal blade is filled with a sloshing red liquid. Standing on tiptoe, she reaches up and slides the blade neatly into the statue's eye. When the dagger is withdrawn a moment later, its hollow blade is empty. The woman takes a step away from the statue, sheathes the dagger, and then vanishes.

The woman is the Kargat officer Francine Pavlina, a wererat (see page 32). She has just transferred life force from her *blood blade* into a crystal skull. This done, she slipped her *ring of invisibility* back onto her finger and scurried away.

Statue Sabotage

This encounter can be set at any of the alcoves that contains a statue whose head has been replaced with a crystal skull. It assumes that the heroes are watching from a place of concealment. Read the players the following:

A woman wearing the ash-gray robes of a priest and carrying a small sickle with a gilded blade hurries through the temple, casting furtive glances over her shoulder. Her skin is midnight-black, causing her to blend with the shadows, but her hair is a stark, bone white.

The woman slips inside one of the alcoves that opens off the nave and reaches out a hand toward the statue that is housed there. Before she can touch the statue, her hand is thrown back, as if by an unseen force.

Reaching into a pouch at her hip, the woman pulls out a crystal. Raising it to her eyes, she peers through it. She then grunts and puts the crystal away again.

Next, the woman murmurs what sounds like a prayer; the only words you can make out are a name, "Kiaransalee," and a word in the common tongue, "vengeance." The woman then turns from the statue and hurries away with grim determination.

The woman is Dominique Nagy, a drow elf (see page 30). The magical crystal she just used is a *gem of seeing*; it enabled her to see through the illusion that surrounds the statue and revealed the presence of the crystal skull.

Unless the heroes interfere, Dominique goes to her bedroom (Room D4) and slips through the secret door in its wall into one of the temple's treasuries (Room E2). From its trove of magical items, she selects a *wand of negation*. She plans to use the wand to sabotage the crystal skull.

Dominique leaves the *gem of seeing* inside the treasury and hurries back to the statue. Unfortunately, before she can test the wand, Lowellyn Dachine spots her and orders her away from the statue. Dominique returns to her room and replaces the wand in the treasury, deciding to wait for a better opportunity.

If the heroes are quick and stealthy, they can follow Dominique and peek in through the door of her room to learn the location of the secret door that leads to the treasury. If they can sneak into this treasury, they can loot it. The priests will probably blame the Kargat, unless the heroes have previously been spotted lurking in the temple.

If the heroes instead choose to overpower Dominique they can gain either the *gem of seeing* (if they jump her before she goes to her room) or the *wand of negation* (if they attack as she is returning). Should they attack Dominique in the treasury, she can make use of the magical items it houses, or can flee through its second secret door to safety. If she escapes and then meets the heroes at a later point in the adventure, she will go to any length to wreak her vengeance upon them.

Dominique does not realize that the crystal skulls are part of the *infernal machine* and probably wouldn't care if she did. She believes the statues of the death god are images of her deity, and wishes only to "cleanse" them of this desecration.

(For more information on the appearance of the statue and characteristics of the crystal skull, see **The Crystal Skulls**, page 34.)

Contents of Temple Treasury (Room E2): 1,200 gp, 17,900 sp, 200 cp, *wand of negation* (40 charges), *gem of seeing*, *elixir of madness*, *potion of gaseous form*, *potion of polymorph self*, *potion of ventriloquism*, *scroll of protection from undead*, *staff-spear*, *gloves of missile snaring*, scroll: 5th-level priest spell *atonement*.

Abattoir Experiments

This encounter is set in one of the chapels (Room C2) and the bedroom of Burlin Netherwood (Room D1). It assumes that the heroes are watching from the nave of the temple. Read the players the following:

> A tiny, evil looking gnome in the ash gray robes of a priest pauses outside a locked door, then opens it with a key. He quickly slips inside and closes the door behind him.
>
> From inside the room you hear the sound of breaking glass. After a moment or two the gnome emerges again, holding a cloth sack. Something squirms inside it. Chuckling with evil glee, he hurries away.

The gnome is the priest Burlin Netherwood (see page 31). He has just released a rat from one of the three magical stained glass windows in the chapel. These function in the same manner as a *mirrors of life trapping* (as described on page 232 of the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide*) and were originally placed in the temple to rid it of vermin, but wound up malfunctioning and now capture any living creature that stands directly in front of the windows within 30 feet of their inner surface. Burlin released the rat by hurling a stone and shattering a pane in one window. He then scooped up the rat that this action released and stuffed it into his sack.

If the heroes enter the chapel, read the following to the players:

> The altar in this chapel is a smaller version of the one in the nave of the temple, and is also made out of broken tombstones. In the wall behind it are three stained glass windows. They are different from the other windows in the temple, which all show scenes of the dead rising from their graves. These windows instead each depict a dozen rats in tortured poses, as if they were performing a macabre dance.
>
> Several of the panes in one window have been broken. It seems that someone has taken a dislike to the images and has shattered them.

Any heroes who approach to within 30 feet of the windows (who enter more than 10 feet into the room) and stand directly in front of an unbroken pane must make a successful saving throw vs. spell to avoid becoming trapped within a *window of life trapping*. The victim appears as an image within the stained glass and can be released by breaking the window.

Burlin was able to avoid the life trapping effects because he knows the windows' command word.

While it is possible to break individual rats out and leave the rest of a window intact, breaking a window that holds a hero shatters the entire window. A dozen rats are released along with the hero. They are ravenously hungry and immediately attack anyone in the room. During the resulting melee, there is a good chance that other characters will wander into the range of a still-intact *window of life trapping*.

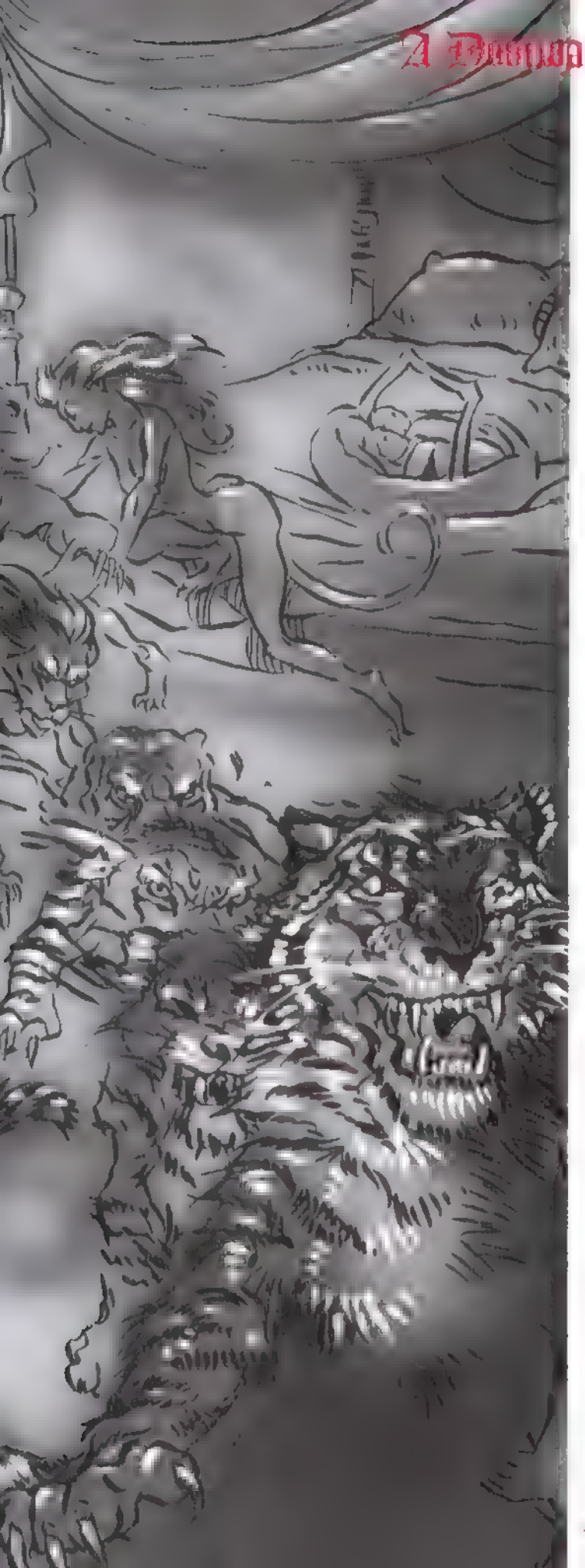
Note: The *windows of life trapping* do not affect undead creatures, nor do they affect Death. The priests all know of the dangers they pose, but the Kargat and Ebon Fold do not.

Rat (Common) (12 per window): AC 7; MV 15; HD 1/4; hp 2; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1 (bite); SA disease; SW fear fire; SZ T (1' long); ML unreliable (4); Int animal (1); AL N; XP 6.

Notes: The bite of a rat has a 5% chance of inflicting a serious disease unless the victim makes a successful saving throw vs. poison.

If the heroes instead follow Burlin, he hurries back to his room (Room D1). Here, he places the rat into one of his miniature devices. Read the following to the players if they follow Burlin back to his room (or if they encounter him there on another occasion):

> This bedroom is crowded with tables, each of which holds a variety of tiny metal-and-wood contraptions. Most seem to be miniature execution or torture devices of one kind or another; you can recognize a tiny guillotine, rack, and an iron maiden.
>
> Sitting at one of the tables with his back to you is a gnome in gray priest's robes. He has just strapped a squirming



rat into a spring-loaded device. Touching a button, he activates it. In an eye-blink, the rat is torn into four pieces. Gouts of red splatter the walls, and the smell of fresh blood fills the air. The gnome chuckles in delight, and raises a blood-splattered hand as he speaks: "Drink well of this blood, O Urdlen, and grant me your blessings."

Among the devices on the work tables is a miniature version of the golden coffin. It is an exact replica, but is non-magical. Burlin built it in an effort to figure out the function of the *infernal machine*. His current theory is that the coffin is some sort of execution chamber that suffocates its victims. A dead rat lies inside it.

If Burlin is attacked by the heroes, he uses his blowpipe to blind them (see his description on page 31). If the battle goes poorly, he flees through the secret door at the rear of his room, inadvertently revealing the location of one of the temple's treasuries. He grabs the *+1 dagger of venom* on his way through the treasury and exits through the far secret door. He returns in 1d4+2 rounds with 2d4 1st-level Temple Priests (see page 31). If the heroes tarry too long in the treasury they will be forced to fight their way out of this area.

Contents of Temple Treasury (Room E1): 2,000 gp, 5,600 sp, 400 cp, *potion of clairvoyance*, *elixir of health*, *potion of invisibility*, *potion of undead control* (skeletons), *+1 ring of protection*, *+1 dagger of venom* (holds three doses of Type O poison), *boots of dancing*, *robe of vermin*, scroll: 3rd-level priest spell *remove curse*.

Pasha's Secret

When the weretiger Pasha Bella was assigned to accompany Lowellyn Dachine to the Temple of the Eternal Order in Nartok, she did not tell her superiors that she was soon to give birth. Pasha also kept this secret from her fellow Kargat officers. Once her two cubs were born, she hid them from the priests, who would regard the presence of newborns in a temple dedicated to death as blasphemy.

Of the Kargat officers, only Pasha insisted that a lock be installed on the door of her room (Room D3). She has hidden her two

newborn cubs in a basket under her bed.

In this encounter, a priest discovers Pasha's secret. The heroes may be hiding in an adjoining meeting room (Room F1) when its secret door is opened, or may be watching in the hallway as a priest picks the lock on Pasha's door. Read the players the following:

> After glancing once more over his shoulder, the priest eases the door open. He peers intently into the room, listens a moment, then crouches to peer underneath something. Suddenly he tenses.
>
> "Blasphemy!" he cries. One hand clasped over his mouth as if he were about to be suddenly ill, he turns from the doorway.

If the heroes stop the priest, he is too shaken to give them a coherent account of what he has just seen. If the heroes let him go, the priest is immediately confronted by Pasha Bella (see page 32). Realizing that her secret has been discovered, she shifts into weretiger form and tears the priest to pieces. She then tries to *charm* the more powerful heroes into keeping quiet about the incident. If they seem about to reveal her secret or attack her cubs, she fights to the death to defend them. Alternatively, she may scoop up the cubs and flee the temple (leaving their basket and blankets behind).

If the heroes immediately search the bedroom, Pasha may kill the priest in the hallway or outer room, quickly and quietly, without the heroes noticing. She then enters her room in human form, once again trying to *charm* the heroes.

Read the following when the heroes discover the cubs:

> A basket is hidden under the bed. Inside it, something is squirming. The creature is crying softly, making a sound reminiscent of the mewling cries of a newborn kitten.
>
> There is more movement, and now you can see what the basket contains: two human babies, their tiny hands grasping at the blankets that cover them. Each has soft brown eyes and downy hair that is a lustrous golden color and silky in texture.

Harming a newborn child (even a weretiger cub) is cause for a powers check. It is ranked alongside the murder of an innocent; any hero who participates in this act has a 10% chance of attracting the attentions of the dark powers.

Depending upon the heroes' actions, Pasha may or may not trust them to keep her secret. If she suspects that they will tell the priests or Kargat, she may flee the temple with her cubs. Even if she thinks that the heroes will keep her secret, she moves the cubs to a new hiding place as a safeguard. At the Dungeon Master's discretion, this new hiding place may be within the temple (especially if any of the other bedrooms have been left vacant due to the deaths of other NPCs). This second area now also becomes a sanctuary against Death (see the chapter **The Ascension**, page 48).

Forbidden Knowledge

This encounter takes place in the hallway outside the scriptorium (Area G). It assumes that the heroes have a good view of this area or can at least hear the verbal exchange. Read the following to the players:

> The double doors at the center of the hallway open, and an extremely tall, skeletally thin man steps out through them. He has a high forehead, receding hairline, and is dressed in the ash-gray robes of a priest. Rings glitter on his fingers.
>
> At the same moment, another man in priestly robes rounds the corner. Seeing the first man emerging through the double doors, he comes to an abrupt halt.
>
> "You there!" the thin man says imperiously. "Where do you think you're going?"
>
> "I j-just wanted to replenish the c-candles in the scriptorium, your worship," the second man stutters.
>
> "Give them to me," the first man hisses. "No one, not even the bishop, is to enter this room." Snatching the candles, he opens the door and disappears back through the double doors as the second priest scurries away.
>
> After a moment, the thin man emerges once more through the double doors and strides away.

The heroes have just witnessed an exchange between Lowellyn Dachine and one of the temple's 1st-level priests. Unbeknownst to either man, one of the candles, which Lowellyn has just placed on one of the candelabras in the scriptorium, is magical. It can be distinguished from the others by the ground-up crystal it contains, which lends a glitter to its waxy surface.

This candle was intended as an attack on Lowellyn. A few rounds after it has been lit, it emits an aromatic scent that affects anyone who smells it in the same manner as a *feeblemind* spell. Unfortunately for the priests who plotted this revenge, Lowellyn lit the candle and immediately left the room.

Any heroes entering the scriptorium and approaching within 10 feet of this candle (located to the northwest of the table) while it is burning must make a successful saving throw vs. spell to avoid its magical effect. The candle burns out after two hours.

Read the following to the players when the heroes enter the scriptorium:

> The walls of this room are lined with shelves; these hold countless books, scrolls, and stacks of paper. A single table at the far end of the room is flanked by two large wrought-iron candelabras. Candles burn brightly, casting a warm, yellow glow upon the papers that have been spread out across the table.

The books and scrolls in the scriptorium are non-magical texts that discuss various matters concerned with death and dying: embalming practices, funeral rites, the dissection of corpses, and so on. Among these is a single magical tome, a *book of vile darkness*. Fortunately, the text was improperly copied and thus is less potent than normal. Good-aligned priests who look inside the book must make a successful saving throw vs. poison or suffer 6d6 points of damage, they must additionally make a successful saving throw vs. spell or be driven insane. Good-aligned characters who are not priests suffer 5d4 points of damage if they handle the book and, if they read it, must make a successful saving throw vs. spell to avoid being transformed into evil characters. Otherwise, the tome has none of the other effects of a *book of vile darkness*.

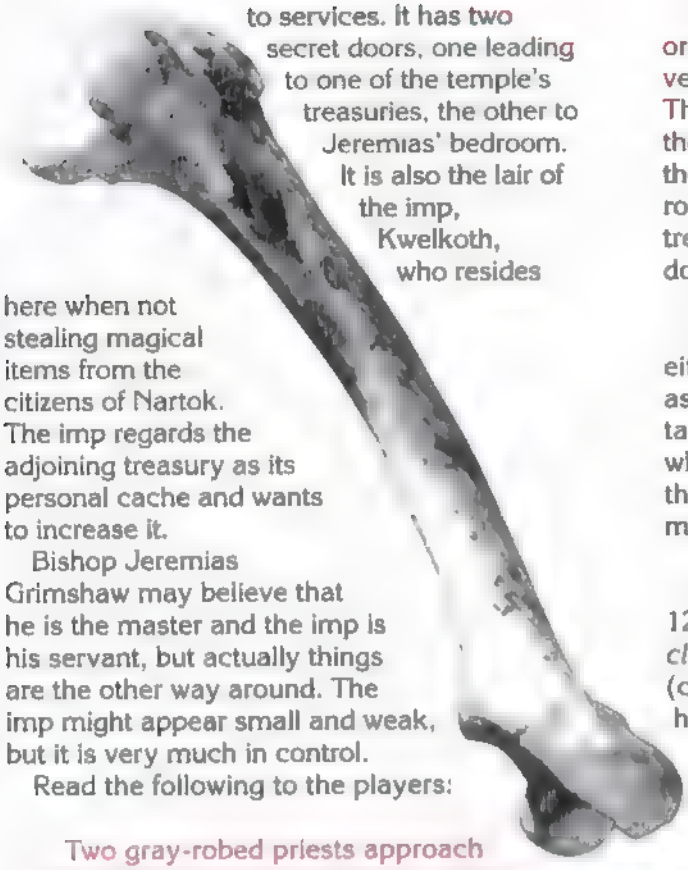
The papers on the table include a rough sketch of the *infernal machine* (see description on page 48). Scrawled on this document is the following cryptic note: "Five receivers in alignment. One transmitter missing. Align two receivers toward one skull?"

There is also a half-finished letter on the table, beside a pot of ink and a quill pen. (At the Dungeon Master's discretion, the heroes may instead find this letter in Lowellyn's bedroom (Room B1.) When the heroes read the letter, read the following to the players:

> *To my faithful father, from his humble servant Lowellyn:*
>
> *My work in Nartok is progressing well. The machine is complete and is nearly charged to capacity. My officers need take only a few more lives before the experiment can begin.*
>
> *I await, with eager anticipation, the hour in which I can emerge, transformed, from this prototype. I await, with even greater joy and anticipation, the day on which you shall ascend from the master device. Great shall be our power then! Great shall be the fear of the mortals we command!*
>
> *Is the construction of the second device going according to plan? Have any flaws been discovered that would warrant changes to the device we have constructed here?*
>
> *Aside from the loss of the skull, we have had only minor problems. The temple priests resent our presence, but I feel confident that their petty jealousies will not delay our . . . .*

Master and Servant

This encounter assumes that the heroes have a good view of the area or at least can hear the verbal exchange. It can be set either in the vestry (Area J) or in the area outside its double doors. The vestry is a crowded room that holds a multitude of priests' robes and pots of white clay that the priests smear on their faces prior



to services. It has two secret doors, one leading to one of the temple's treasuries, the other to Jeremias' bedroom. It is also the lair of the imp, Kwelkoth, who resides here when not stealing magical items from the citizens of Nartok. The imp regards the adjoining treasury as its personal cache and wants to increase it.

Bishop Jeremias Grimshaw may believe that he is the master and the imp is his servant, but actually things are the other way around. The imp might appear small and weak, but it is very much in control.

Read the following to the players:

Two gray-robed priests approach the double doors of the vestry which stand open. Each is carrying a leather sack that clinks slightly, as if there were coins inside. The sacks are slightly damp.

Before they can enter the vestry they are halted by a thin, bald man in his mid-50s who is wearing a gray priest's robe embroidered with golden sickles.

"Are those the tithes?" he asks. When the priests nod, he adds, "Take them to another room. This one is too close to the Kargat."

The priests bow slightly, and turn to comply. Before they can leave, a small, bat-winged creature scurries out through the double doors to confront them. It is a creature of nightmare, with a horn on its head and a barbed tail that lashes back and forth.

"Stop!" it hisses. It points back through the doors. "The treasure belongs in here."

The thin priest's face clouds with barely suppressed fury. "Kwelkoth!" he barks. "You are my servant. I order you to . . . ."

Suddenly his face goes slack. "Yes," he whispers. "The treasure belongs in here."

Unless the heroes intervene, Jeremias orders the priests to place the sacks in the vestry, then returns to his bedroom (Room H). The two 1st-level priests shrug, then follow the imp into the vestry. They shut the doors, then open the secret door at the rear of the room and place the sacks of coins inside the treasury (Room E3). A few minutes later, the double doors open and the priests leave.

Each sack contains 70 sp.

If the heroes enter the vestry, Kwelkoth may either attack them (possibly with the assistance of the two 1st-level priests) or may talk to them. It recognizes magical treasure when it sees it, and may try to trick or threaten the heroes into surrendering any magical items they are carrying.

Contents of Temple Treasury (Room E3): 12,000 gp, 1,000 sp, 800 cp, *potion of climbing*, *potion of extra healing*, *sweet water* (can turn the unholy water in one font into holy water), *scroll of protection from Lycanthropes* (werebears), *+2 shield*, *horn of fog*, scroll: 4th-level wizard spell *remove curse*.

Imp: AC 2; MV 6, Fl 18 (A); HD 2+2; hp 12; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (tail sting); SA poison; SD immune to cold, fire, and electricity, silver or magical weapon to hit, regeneration; MR 25%, resists spells as 7 Hit Die monster; SZ T (2' tall); ML avg (10); Int avg (10); AL LE; XP 650.

Notes: A successful hit by an imp's tail injects Type F poison, victims who fail a saving throw vs. poison instantly die. The imp can polymorph into giant rat or monkey form, and attacks using the natural weapons of those creatures (for details see page 25).

Imps regenerate 1 point per melee round. They can use *detect magic* or become invisible at will. Once per day they can use a *suggestion* spell.

The Ascension

Dear, beauteous
Death! the jewel of
the just,
Shining nowhere, but
in the dark,
What mysteries do lie
beyond thy dust,
Could man outlook that mark!

Henry Vaughan

The climax of this adventure occurs when the *infernal machine* is at last activated. As soon as someone climbs (or is placed) inside the golden coffin at the *machine's* heart, the character begins an irreversible transformation into a powerful, lich-like creature known only as "Death."

In the most likely course of events, Lowellyn Dachine becomes "Death," but it is possible that another character, even one of the heroes, will wind up as the victim of this fiendish experiment!

There are three different ways in which the climax can play itself out:

Scenario 1: Lowellyn decides that the time has come to test the *infernal machine*. Perhaps all of the crystal skulls have been filled to capacity or perhaps the heroes have been successful in destroying one or more of the skulls and he wants to use the *machine* before any further damage is done.

Lowellyn gathers all of the Kargat officers and Eternal Order priests together in the rear nave. He knows that when he emerges transformed he will be hungry for life force. He wants plenty of victims close at hand. He has not share this particular detail with his co-conspiritors.

During the testing of the *machine* the double doors leading to the rear nave (normally kept locked) are left open. Since everyone's attention will be focused on Lowellyn, it should be easy for the heroes to sneak into the rear nave and see what is going on.

Scenario 2: The heroes may choose to stay away from the nave and fail to witness the creation of Death. This is the least desirable of the three possibilities, but it may be how events will play themselves out for cautious parties.

Scenario 3: Stealthy heroes may gain access to the rear nave and examine the golden coffin and the *infernal machine* before Lowellyn Dachine arrives. One of the heroes may be magically compelled to climb into the coffin and close the lid (see the **The Hero's Ascension**, page 50, for the reason why). This action activates the *infernal machine*. When the coffin opens, the heroes wind up in a showdown with a member of their own party who has been permanently transformed into the creature known as Death. This showdown will also include Lowellyn Dachine, who will come running as soon as he realizes that the *infernal machine* has been activated. At the Dungeon Master's discretion, other members of the Kargat or the priesthood may accompany Lowellyn.

The Golden Coffin

The heart of the *infernal machine* is a golden coffin, located in the temple's rear nave. Read the following when the heroes first see it:

Situated directly under the rear dome of the temple is a strange device. It looks like a huge coffin, either gilded or made entirely of gold. The lid is closed.

The surface of the coffin is covered in strange red symbols. These seem to be constantly shifting and rearranging themselves, flowing across the surface like rivulets of blood, then reshaping themselves into coherent form once more.

Clear glass tubes protrude straight out from the ends and sides of the coffin for a foot or two then curve upward to end at about chest height. Each terminates in a circular piece of frosted glass that has a hole at its center. Each of these concave plates is oriented in a slightly different direction, but all are generally facing toward the south.

The glass "plates" each point toward a different crystal skull in its hidden location (see page 35). When the *infernal machine* is activated (by closing the lid of the golden coffin when a living human or demihuman is within), rays of magical energy shoot out from the crystal skulls, enter these receiving dishes, and are funnelled down through the tubes into the coffin itself.

By peering through the holes at the center of the plates, the heroes may be able to make an educated guess as to the approximate locations of the five crystal skulls.

The coffin (including both the golden box and the glass tubes and "plates" attached to it) has had the same magical protections placed upon it as the crystal skulls have: a permanent *avoidance* spell, a permanent *alarm* spell, and a more powerful version of the *globe of invulnerability* spell. Two *dispel magic* spells must be cast to permanently negate the first two spells. The third protective spell, however, is impossible to negate, except with a *wish* spell. Like the crystal skulls, the golden coffin cannot be harmed by weapons, even magical ones.

Dachine's Ascension

If **Scenario 1** is being used, it starts while the heroes are exploring the church. Read the following to the players, omitting from the description any of the NPCs whom the heroes may have already eliminated:

You hear the murmur of voices and see a large group of people heading toward the locked double doors that section off the rear of the temple. Leading the group is a tall, thin man wearing the ash-gray robes of a priest of Death and a round cloth cap on his head. Surrounding him, and obviously acting as either his bodyguards or personal attendants, are four individuals: a hulking giant of a man with a glowering expression, a small woman with spectacles who looks around nervously, a stubble-haired man whose face is crisscrossed with scars, and a stunningly beautiful woman dressed in elegant silks.

Immediately behind this group is a bald man in his 50s, an important church official, judging by the golden embroidery on the sleeves of his robe. He is followed by a collection of a dozen or so temple priests, including an elven woman with jet-black skin and pale white hair and an evil-looking gnome who has to jog to keep up with the others.

In the rear, and hurrying to catch up, are a mismatched pair, a short, scruffy looking fellow, and a taller man dressed in expensive, tailored clothes.

The group includes Lowellyn Dachine, Bishop Jeremias Grimshaw, all of the temple priests, the four Kargat officers, and the two Ebon Fold members.

If the heroes sneak into the rear nave behind this procession (an easy task, as long as they don't make a lot of noise), they can watch the NPCs gather in a loose circle around the golden coffin. If this is the heroes' first look at the coffin, read the description of it on page 48 then add the following:

The man who was leading the group strides up to the golden coffin and opens it. As he turns to face the others, his four attendants arrange themselves in a loose circle around him, as if to prevent the others from approaching.

The leader holds up a hand for silence. "The moment of the ascension is at hand!" he cries in a voice that

quavers with excitement. "You shall behold the power of Death!" Then he turns and steps into the coffin. Laying down inside it, he begins to close the lid upon himself. As he does, a loud humming fills the air.

If the heroes manage to kill or incapacitate Lowellyn before he can shut the coffin lid, one of the Kargat officers or priests hauls him out of the coffin and takes his place. The other assembled NPCs fight to the death to prevent the heroes from disrupting the test any further. The DM should manipulate the situation so at least one character enters the coffin, even if it means bringing in more NPCs. The heroes can't be everywhere and, eventually, an NPC will manage to fulfill his master's wishes and activate the *infernal machine*.

If the heroes are not in the nave when either Dachine or one of the other NPCs enters the golden coffin, either because they are following **Scenario 2** or fled immediately when they saw the *machine*, they witness the effect of the *infernal machine* from elsewhere in the temple. The following text describes what they see, and it should be read to the players:

You hear a loud humming noise that steadily increases in volume. It seems to be coming from the rear of the church, from the area beyond the double doors that now stand open.

Suddenly, brilliant red rays of light flash across the nave of the temple. They originate from several of the statues of Death and are beaming toward the northern end of the temple, passing without interruption through walls and other solid matter. The beams of light are the color of freshly shed blood and create an ominous hissing noise as they slice through the air.

It is impossible to impede or reflect these rays of "light," since they are merely the visual component of the life force being transferred from the crystal skulls to the receiving dishes on the golden coffin. Should one of these rays touch a living creature, the effect is the same as being stabbed with a *blood blade*; a portion of that creature's life force is sucked out of his body and conveyed along the beam to the coffin. (The victim suffers one point of damage and loses one energy level and all spells and abilities tied to that level, see page 21.)

If the heroes don't go to the back of the church to investigate the target of the rays, the DM should skip to the section labeled **Death Ascendant** (page 54).

The Hero's Ascension

If the Dungeon Master plans to use **Scenario 3**, one of the heroes will be transformed into the creature called "Death."

The DM should have all the heroes make a saving throw vs. death magic when they first see the *infernal machine*. Adjustments to this roll will be made based on who acted in a particularly heroic or cowardly manner during the confrontation when the heroes first entered Ravenloft (during the **In the Mists** section) and how the heroes resolved the problem with the Milhausen family (during the **Shelter From the Storm** section). Heroic characters, and those who voted to leave the Milhausen family in peace, roll the save with a +2 modifier. Cowardly characters, and those who voted to chase off or kill Erhard, receive a –2 modifier. If the end result for the Milhausens was that they lost their son, all the characters receive an additional –1 modifier. Any heroes who fail this roll have their minds clouded by the evil that permeates this area. The coffin's *avoidance* spell is instead felt as an *attraction* spell by these individuals, who have an overwhelming desire to climb inside the coffin, lie down, and shut the lid. This triggers the *alarm* spell.

If more than one hero is affected, they may even fight one another for the "privilege" of being sealed inside the coffin. However, they might also just climb in their together, this depends on the personalities of the individual heroes. They may see the urge to get into the coffin as a contest between them or as a cooperative endeavor.

Dachine and all the remaining NPCs arrive in the nave three rounds after the *alarm* spell

has been triggered. If the affected heroes take longer than that to enter the *infernal machine* (either because they are fighting among themselves or because they are being restrained by their comrades), the Kargat officers and the priests try to stop the heroes while Dachine quickly leaps into the coffin, and the scene plays out as described above in **Dachine's Ascension**.

If a hero is the one transformed into Death, he becomes an NPC and is forevermore under the Dungeon Master's control. Should more than one hero be sealed inside, both are lost. The DM should give Death one extra hit point for each experience level of the second character sealed inside, including Dachine. (Death is described in detail below.)

The Transformation

Once one or more characters have entered the golden coffin, the irreversible process of creating a being that is virutally death incarnate has begun and there is no stopping it. Read the following to the players immediately after the golden coffin has been closed:

> Suddenly, brilliant red rays of light flash into the room, passing without interruption through walls and other solid matter, even through the people who stand in their way. These individuals cry out in pain, and sink to the floor on their knees.
>
> The beams are the color of freshly shed blood and create an ominous hissing noise as they slice through the air. Each one focuses on one of the glass plates attached to the coffin, turning it a violent crimson color. This hue travels down the tube and into the coffin itself, turning the golden metal a dusky red.

The period of time required by the *infernal machine* to complete the transformation of the individual inside it is up to the Dungeon Master, but it should be long enough to give the heroes the illusion that they might be able to halt the transformation. The DM should remember, however, that the transformation will run its course no matter what the heroes do. Hopefully, the futility of their actions will make the emergence of Death even more horrifying.

If the heroes immediately turn and flee, however, add the following before they are able to exit the rear nave:

> Suddenly, the humming noise stops and beams of blood-red light vanish. Now all is still except for a faint creaking noise.
>
> Suddenly, the lid of the coffin flies open. Inside the coffin a dark mist is swirling. Swiftly, it coalesces around three white objects, a skull and two skeletal hands, and takes on a ghostly, human form. No legs support the apparition; it floats a few feet above the open coffin, an occasional flake of cold gray ash drifting down from it to the floor. A faint wind stirs the ash, caressing your skin with a brittle chill that sends shivers down your spine.
>
> Now dim red flames come to life inside the skull's eye sockets and the head turns. As the creature stares at you with a burning intensity, one of its skeletal hands begins to drift away from the body, remaining connected to it by a tendril of shadow and mist. The hand floats slowly toward you, fingers grasping as if ready to seize you in a deadly grip!

At this point, it is important that there be other characters in the room other than the player character heroes. If need be, the DM should have one or more additional NPCs arrive to investigate the noise and the rays of light. One of these newcomers is Death's first victim. Add the following (changing the text to fit the particular NPC) and ask the heroes to make a fear check:

> The skeletal hand pauses, then drifts toward (NPC). As it fastens upon the man's throat, he screams in agony, as if his very spirit were being sundered from his body. As the skeletal hand releases the man, he falls to the floor. Sightless eyes stare vacantly at the ceiling and the body lies contorted with the stiffness of a sudden and most unnatural death.

Death

Neutral Evil

Armor Class	0	Str	18
Movement	Fl 6 (A)	Dex	18
Level/Hit Dice	10	Con	18
Hit Points	5-50	Int	17
THAC0	11	Wis	18
No. of Attacks	2	Cha	3
Damage/Attack	1d4+1 (body touch)		
Special Attacks	vampiric energy drain		
Special Defenses	fear aura; cold aura; immune to *charm*, *sleep*, *enfeeblement*, *polymorph* spells, immune to cold and electricity based attacks, and to death magic		
Special Weaknesses	birth symbols		
Magic Resistance	50%		

Combat: Weapons pass harmlessly through Death's mist-and-shadow body. The only solid portions of the creature are its skull and skeletal hands, which are Armor Class 0 and which may only be damaged by magical weapons. Any weapon striking the skull is affected as if it were the victim of a *crystalbrittle* spell. Non-magical weapons immediately shatter while magical weapons shatter unless the wielder can make a successful save based on the weapon's magical bonus. (For each +1 of bonus, the weapon has a 5% chance of saving.)

Death projects an aura of *fear*. Those who look upon Death must make a successful saving throw vs. spell or flee in terror for 4d4 rounds. Death also projects an aura of cold; the room palpably chills when Death is present. Anyone approaching within 15 feet of Death must make a saving throw vs. death magic or be chilled to the extent that he suffers the same effects as produced by a *slow* spell. These effects cease when the character moves beyond the 15-foot range. Any character actually touching or passing through the mist-and-shadow portion of the body suffers 1d4+1 points of damage from this brief contact with the Negative Energy Plane.

Death attacks by detaching its skeletal hands from its "body" and sending them floating toward its intended targets. A successful touch by one of these hands (use a normal unarmed combat attack) instantly drains life force.

If the victim makes a successful saving throw vs. death magic, only half of his total life force is lost; the victim is reduced to half of his former experience level and hit points (rounded down). Any level-linked abilities are also lost. These effects are permanent, and may only be reversed with a *wish* spell.

If the saving throw is not successful, the victim is instantly slain as all of the life force is drawn from his body. After lying still for one round, the corpse rises as a zombie under Death's control at the beginning of the next melee round.

While Death is attacking, a long, thin streamer of mist and shadow connects its skeletal hands to its body. If this connection can be even momentarily disrupted (for example, by a weapon or other object passing through the streamer), Death loses control of the hand for that round and cannot use it to attack. The hand immediately withdraws into its body, but on the next round a new streamer is formed and the attack is resumed. (For the purpose of determining whether a weapon passes through the streamer, its Armor Class is 3. Successful hits do not damage Death.)

The attack can also be interrupted by a character who uses a portion of his own body to disrupt the streamer (passing a hand through it, for example). That character, however, suffers 1d4+1 points of damage from making contact with Death's body.

Death is not undead, so it cannot be turned. It has the ability, however, to automatically control any undead creature within the temple, including both the zombies it creates from the corpses of its victims and the skeletons in the sepulchers. The heroes may attempt to turn these undead creatures (thus temporarily breaking Death's hold over them for the duration of the turning) or to destroy them. But this is a difficult task. In addition to the sinkhole of evil affect found within the temple (which results in a –2 penalty to turning attempts), if Death itself is present while the turning is being attempted there is an additional –2 penalty.

Death can see even in absolute darkness and moves by slowly flying. It leaves a faint trail of cold ashes in its wake.

Hit Points: Death's initial hit points are based on the number of crystal skulls that were still functional at the time of its emergence from the coffin. For each intact skull that still held life force-saturated blood, Death gains 10 hit points. Thus, if all five skulls were functional when it emerged from the coffin, Death would have 50 hit points.

If all five crystal skulls are destroyed before Death emerges, it begins with just 5 hit points.

These hit points are distributed between the two skeletal hands and the skull. Each of the hands has one-fifth of the starting hit points while the skull has the remaining three-fifths. Thus each skeletal hand will have 1–10 hit points, while the skull will have 3–30 hit points.

If a skeletal hand is destroyed (reduced to 0 or fewer hit points) the fragments fly back to Death's body and swirl around inside it. Here, they reassemble into a hand once more. This hand emerges from the body after 1d4+2 rounds with the same number of hit points with which it started.

Should the skull be destroyed, the hands break into pieces and fall to the floor. Neither the skull nor the hands will reform from this point on. Death is reduced to a mist-and-shadow body with glowing red eyes where the skull was once suspended. It is still capable, however, of inflicting damage (via the touch of its body) and still remains in control of any zombies and skeletons within the temple. And now that it no longer has any solid components to its body, it can pass through walls like a ghost.

Death feels an insatiable need to drain the life force from other creatures. Its hit points steadily increase as it uses its energy drain attack, which has vampiric qualities. On each successful attack, the hit points drained from a victim are transferred to Death. These additional, temporary hit points are concentrated in the skull. They remain there for one day, after which they are lost, thus making Death's hunger for life force truly insatiable.

Special Weaknesses: Death has a particular abhorrence for anything associated with birth. The cry of a newborn creature (human or animal) causes it excruciating pain, forcing it to immediately curtail any attacks and to lose the concentration necessary to control its zombies. The forceful presentation of an object associated with birth (a baby's blanket, for example) drives it back as if it were an undead creature that had been turned.

Death Ascendant

The heroes must now face what is perhaps the deadliest foe they have ever encountered, a being who almost literally is death incarnate.

The remainder of this adventure should be run as a prolonged chase. Death may be slow, but its pursuit is relentless. Its sole purpose is to consume the life force of every being inside the temple and its hunger can never be satiated. Worst of all, it need never rest nor sleep.

Because it has solid components (the skeletal hands and skull), Death cannot pass through walls or other solid objects, although it can use its hands to open doors or to carry and use a key. It can also order its undead minions (the zombies it creates from those it slays and the skeletons in the sepulchers) to tear down any barricades the heroes might set up. These minions can also be used to attack the heroes in an effort to herd them toward Death.

The Dungeon Master should keep track of the number of skeletons and zombies available for Death to control. There is a total of 16 skeletons inside sepulchers within the temple; once these have been destroyed by the heroes (or driven out of the temple by turning them) they cannot be replaced. The total number of zombies available to Death is likewise limited by the number of NPCs and heroes within the temple for Death to slay. Once again, those zombies destroyed or driven out of the temple by the heroes are not replaced.

Skeleton: AC 7; MV 12; HD 1; hp 5; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (uses bony hand as club); SD immune to cold-based attacks, piercing weapons inflict only half damage; SW holy water; MR immune to *charm*, *hold*, *sleep* spells; SZ M (6' tall); ML fearless (20); Int non-(0); AL N; XP 65.

Zombie: AC 8; MV 6; HD 2; hp 10; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (pummel); SW holy water; MR immune to cold-based attacks and *charm*, *hold*, *sleep*, and *death magic* spells; SZ M (character's height); ML fearless (20); Int non-(0); AL N; XP 65.

Notes: Zombies are slow-moving and strike last in any combat round.

Faced with Death's relentless pursuit, the heroes may attempt to flee the temple. Unfortunately, at the moment that the transformation occurred, the Temple of the Eternal Order was cut off from the rest of Darkon by Ravenloft's Mists. Outside every door and window is nothing but thick, swirling fog. Any character who tries to flee into it winds up back at the temple again after taking only a few steps into the Mists. There is absolutely no escape, either for the heroes or for the surviving priests and Kargat members who are trapped in the temple with them. (Kind Dungeon Masters may allow heroes who flee into the Mists to wind up at a different door to the temple than the one by which they exited. The Mists can thus be used as a means of temporarily eluding pursuit by escaping to a different part of the temple.)

Death and its undead minions' constant pursuit should be extremely unnerving and frightening. Skeletons should leap out of their sepulchers to block the heroes' path, and NPCs whom the heroes saw slain (perhaps even slew themselves) return as zombies to pursue them once more. The heroes may be able to strike a temporary alliance with the priests or Kargat while fighting Death, but these individuals will break this truce when the first opportunity to betray the heroes presents itself.

There is, however, a temporary refuge. Death will not enter Room D3, the bedroom where Pasha Bella had hidden her newborn cubs. Death shuns this area because the force of Birth is so strong here. Even its undead minions recoil, and will not enter this room.

If the heroes are having difficulty figuring this out, the Dungeon Master can have Vito discover Death's odd aversion to the room. The Vistana can then use the temporary respite offered by this area to perform a tarokka reading and reveal Death's weakness. The DM should stack the deck of cards to give the appropriate result: The Innocent . (See page 4 for the reading.)

Note: If Vito has been slain, the heroes instead find this tarokka card in the room, and one of them hears the voice of Vito's spirit whispering in his ear.

Having discovered Death's weakness, the heroes can use it to drive Death from the temple. This may be accomplished through a dramatic presentation of either a newborn weretiger cub or of any item associated with it (baby blankets or basket, for example). When this happens, read the following to the players:

> With a howl of anger and pain, the embodiment of Death reels back from the item (child) in your hand. It flings up its skeletal hands to shield its eyes, which have already faded to a dull red glow. Fleeing as quickly as it can, the creature leaves a whirlwind of cold ash in its wake.
>
> At last, driven to one of the temple's outer doors, it flings open the door and retreats into the mist that surrounds the temple. Its howl of anguish gradually recedes, as the Mists claim the creature.
>
> Now the Mists begin to clear. In another moment, you can see the streets of the city once more. All appears calm; the citizens are going about their daily routine as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened. The creature known as Death has vanished utterly, as if it had never been.

Aftermath

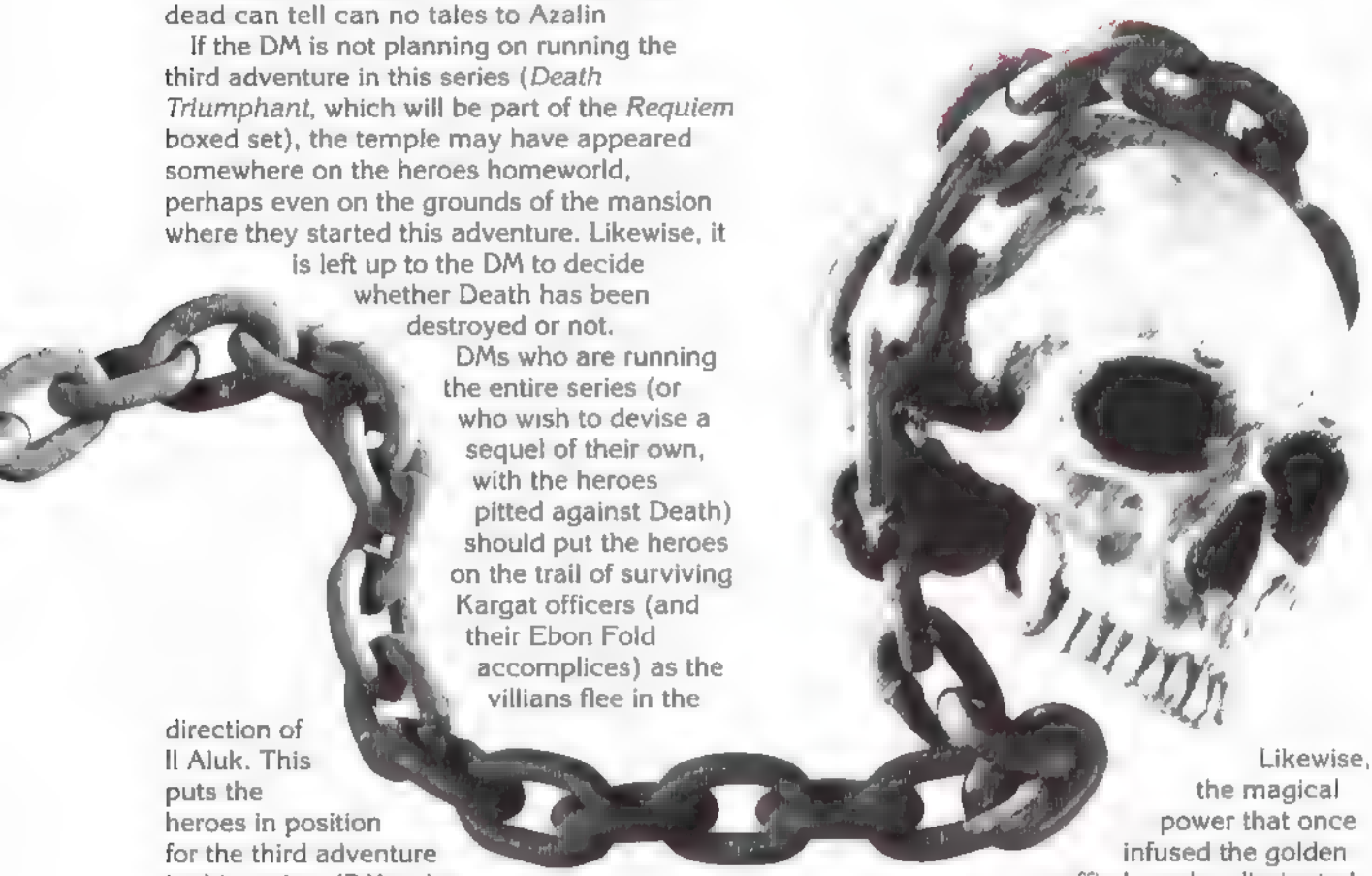
Having driven Death from the Temple of the Eternal Order, the heroes have completed this adventure. If they have also defeated all of the members of the Kargat, Ebon Fold, and priesthood (or if these NPCs were conveniently killed by Death) the heroes are free to loot the temple's treasuries.

If members of the priesthood survive, the heroes might be able to persuade them to aid in the "mopping up" of the remaining Kargat and Ebon Fold officers. The priests are angry, after all, at the results of

Lowellyn's experiment and will want revenge. They'll be equally quick to betray the heroes afterward, however, since the dead can tell can no tales to Azalin

If the DM is not planning on running the third adventure in this series (*Death Triumphant*, which will be part of the *Requiem* boxed set), the temple may have appeared somewhere on the heroes homeworld, perhaps even on the grounds of the mansion where they started this adventure. Likewise, it is left up to the DM to decide whether Death has been destroyed or not.

DMs who are running the entire series (or who wish to devise a sequel of their own, with the heroes pitted against Death) should put the heroes on the trail of surviving Kargat officers (and their Ebon Fold accomplices) as the villians flee in the direction of Il Aluk. This puts the heroes in position for the third adventure in this series. (DMs who are running the *Grim Harvest* campaign need to be aware that Death did survive, and will reappear in *Death Triumphant*.)

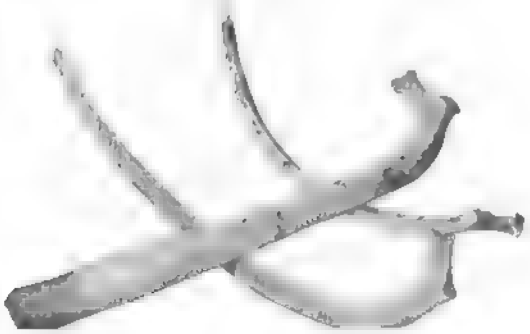


As for the *blood blades* and crystal skulls, all have lost their magical properties. The skulls are mere hunks of glass and the crystal-bladed daggers are too fragile to use as weapons. A dagger will still do one point of damage, but the blade breaks the first time it is used.

Likewise, the magical power that once infused the golden coffin has also dissipated.

The coffin itself has transmuted from gold into worthless lead and the glass tubes and plates attached to its are easily broken now that the coffin's magical defenses have vanished.

The *infernal machine* was only intended to be a one-shot experiment, after all, and thus its parts have all become expendable.



So when the last and dreadful hour
This crumbling pageant shall devour,
The trumpet shall be heard on high,
The dead shall live, the living die,
And music shall untune the sky.

J. Dryden

Darkon is a land of contrasts. Its people are of many different races, and practice the customs of a thousand different lands. Yet all believe that they were born and raised in Darkon. They point out the graves of their "ancestors" and weave long and sometimes contradictory tales that explain why these adopted ancestors are of a different race and lineage than their own.

At the same time that they revere these ancestors, the inhabitants of Darkon fear them. There is a widespread belief among the populace that the dead must be honored and propitiated, lest they rise up from their graves during the Hour of Ascension to exchange places with the living. This belief has given rise to a popular saying: "We claim the dead, lest the dead claim us."

According to legend, Darkon was originally a realm of the dead. These once-free-roaming spirits were displaced by the arrival of the living, and now brood, deep in their tombs, awaiting a chance to rise up and reclaim what was once theirs. This evil day lies at some point in the near future and is believed to be kept at bay only by the worship and appeasement of the gods of death.

The source of this myth is the lord of the domain himself, Azalin, an evil and powerful lich. The people he governs believe him to be no more than a mortal wizard. Many have seen the effects of his spells, but attribute them to other sources. On several occasions he has raised the dead to do his bidding; once, when Darkon was invaded by soldiers from neighboring Falkovnia, Azalin raised an entire army of undead from the bones of those who had fallen in previous battles. Not realizing that Azalin was responsible, the people of Darkon assigned these inexplicable and terrifying "ascendancies" to a magical property of the land itself.

The Eternal Order

Over time, the local beliefs were codified into a religion. Elements from various faiths were incorporated, but all were based on the worship of the same core group of deities: gods that represented the force known as death.

Azalin was quick to turn this fledgling religion into a force to serve his own interests. He named the religion the Eternal Order and financed the construction of a series of temples, some grand and some small. He staffed these with a corps of priestly bureaucrats who had proven both their depravity and their dependability. While these evil priests do have some magical powers (which they believe are granted by the gods of death), the religious services they conduct for the Darkonian populace are a sham and are designed to salve the fears of the populace. They are also a means of lining the coffers of the temples.

The rituals of the Eternal Order give its priests some control over the undead, but they do not protect the lay worshipper in any way. The dead continue to rise up from their graves when Azalin bids them to do so.

Nevertheless, Darkonians are compelled by law to worship every fourth evening at a temple of the Eternal Order. Mass begins

at sunset and ends at the stroke of midnight, known as "the hour of unbalance." Unless the populace prays under the guidance of priests (and unless they each pay a tithe of one silver piece each time they visit the temple), the pendulum will start to tip, and the dead shall come one step closer to the land of the living. So long as the people worship, this dreadful event shall not happen within their lifetime, or so they are told.

On the evening during which the final mass of the month is held, Darkonians observe the Night of the Dead. It is celebrated by laying food and drink on the graves of one's "ancestors" at sundown.

One of the traditional offerings is a bottle of wine that contains a single coin, usually of copper, but sometimes (in the case of wealthy families) of gold or platinum. The only way to obtain this coin is to smash the bottle.

While a great deal of money can be collected on the Night of the Dead, only the very destitute or desperate are willing to seek their fortune in this way. It is said that anyone who smashes a bottle receives, for one week, all of the bad luck of the family that placed it there. Smashing several bottles could result in months or even years of misfortune. In addition, should the bottle be smashed before midnight, it is said that the miscreant will be cursed with an even greater calamity, perhaps even death.

The City of Nartok

Note: The italicized passages contain information for the Dungeon Master only. All other passages may be read to the players as the DM sees fit.

Nartok is a moderate-sized city, home to a population of 7,500. More than half of these are human, although there are a fair number of elves, dwarves, halflings, and gnomes living in the city as well.

Unlike the cities of neighboring Falkovnia, Nartok has no obvious fortifications. No wall or moat surrounds it, and only a handful of militia patrol its streets.

Azalin has little need for fortifications when he can raise the dead from the city's graveyards and tombs whenever they are needed to come to the city's defense.

Nartok lies at the edge of one of Darkon's vast forests, and is supported by lush farmland to the north. It is both sprawling and cosmopolitan, with several marketplaces, a variety of architectural styles, and a number of "ethnic quarters" that various racial groups have claimed as their own, and in which racial languages are spoken.

Due to the mixed background of Darkon's people, the heroes are certain to see many elements that remind them of their homeland. The people, however, identify themselves as "Darkonian." Only a handful, those newcomers who came to Darkon less than three months ago, can remember their original homelands.

If the heroes wish to resupply, they can find just about any non-magical item they are looking for at the prices listed in the *Player's Handbook*. Magical items, however, are sold only in secret, only to people who can be trusted not to report the sale to the Kargat, and at prices that are at least twice the usual cost. They are never openly used in public.

This is due to the fact that, by order of Azalin himself, all magical items that are brought into Darkon become the property of the state. Powerful or unique items are conveyed directly to Azalin; lesser magical items wind up in the hands of the Kargat or the priesthood.

The Kargat (and those among the city militia who act as their eyes and ears) are typically responsible for locating magical items, while the priests of the Eternal Order are responsible for providing a venue for their collection and for faking their "destruction." There is, however, much infighting over the eventual disposition of the spoils.

In Nartok, the priests of the Eternal Order are responsible for the confiscation of magical items. On evenings when midnight masses are held, they encourage the populace to voluntarily surrender any such items to the temple for destruction. Those who refuse are cautioned that they may face "a visitation by death's handmaiden" as a result. The explanation given by the priests is that the dead send one of their messengers to collect the items, in preparation for the coming war against the living.

Those who ignore this warning are ferreted out by Nartok's militia, who are always on the watch for illicit magical items. The militia is under orders to report these items to the

temple's bishop, who then sends an imp to confiscate the item.

The real power in Nartok lies not in the hands of its militia, or the baron who is the city's figurehead. It instead is held by the Kargat, the secret police of the domain.

The vampires, lycanthropes, and ruffians who make up the ranks of the Kargat wear no uniform, but are recognizable by the power that they wield. They have access to magical items, but rarely use them in public, thus keeping up the facade that these items are collected and destroyed.

The general populace recognizes the dreaded name "Kargat" at once; whispers quickly spread when a member of this secret police force is suspected to be in the area, or when a troublemaker or dissenter suddenly disappears in the dead of night, never to be seen again.

Vito Romenza

4th-Level Thief, Neutral Good

Armor Class	7	Str	11
Movement	12	Dex	17
Level/Hit Dice	4	Con	14
Hit Points	13	Int	15
THAC0	19	Wis	15
No. of Attacks	1	Cha	16
Damage/Attack	1d4+1 (sling)		
Special Attacks	surprise attack with sling		
Special Defenses	nil		
Magic Resistance	nil		

PP 65	OL 20	F/RT 15	MS 35
HS 40	DN 45	CW 95	RL 15

Vito Romenza is a handsome, dark-skinned young man in his late teens. He has bushy black eyebrows and a hint of stubble on his chin, but his head is completely bald. According to his family, his hair fell out on the night that his mother died, revealing a pale, star-shaped birthmark on the boy's head. His grandmother believed that this "third eye" marked the awakening of the boy's divinatory powers. Vito's proficiency at fortune telling in recent years seems to have borne out this statement. Vito keeps this mark hidden under a black kerchief that is knotted tightly over his head.

Vito dresses in clothing appropriate to a Vistani entertainer, loose black trousers, high polished boots, and a shirt of golden cloth. He carries his most valued possession, a tarokka deck once owned by his mother, in a velvet pouch that hangs from his belt.

Background: Vito's father died seven years ago, the victim of a bear mauling during an attempt to capture one of the bear's cubs. Vito's mother died five years ago, after contracting a disease during a journey through Falkovnia. Orphaned, Vito and his two younger sisters (Rafina and Misha) came under the care of their aunt Sophia. Later, their paternal grandmother Plishka (who disapproved of the way Sophia was raising the children) also began travelling with the family in her *vardo*, teaching her own brand of discipline and honor.

The Romenza family traditionally made their living as entertainers, specializing in animal acts. After the unfortunate death of Vito's father, they turned to smaller, less dangerous creatures, primarily monkeys. Vito thus is extremely proficient at Animal Handling (17) and Animal Training (18).

Current Sketch: Vito's aunt Sophia was once a skillful thief. After "retiring" to raise her sister's three orphaned children, she began teaching her nephew a few of the tricks of that trade. Vito's grandmother, however, disapproved of stealing, and so Vito had to hide his skills. He instead began teaching them to his pet, a monkey named Tickle. If Grandma Plishka caught the animal in the act of lifting something from a spectator's pocket, Vito could plead ignorance of the monkey's antics.

Combat: Vito's sole weapon is the sling, but he is quite proficient in it. His "backstab" ability takes the form of a surprise sling shot, made from behind and aimed at the target's head. If the sling bullet connects (roll to hit normally, using the +4 modifier for rear attack and ignoring any shield and Dexterity bonuses the target has) there is a chance that the target has been knocked unconscious.

If Vito's to hit roll was exactly on the target number, there is a 5% chance that the victim of this attack will be knocked unconscious. For each point by which the to hit roll exceeded the target number, add another 5%. Even if this percentage roll succeeds, however, the target can avoid being knocked unconscious by making a successful saving throw vs. paralysis.

Note: If the target is wearing a helmet, the chance of being knocked unconscious is a flat 5%.

Special Abilities: In addition to being able

to tell fortunes using the tarokka deck (see the section **Running This Adventure**, page 3), Vito has another rare Vistani divination talent. Through his power of true seeing he is able to locate the rightful owner of any object he has in his possession.

Vito merely suspends the item by a string, holds it in front of him, and turns around like the needle of a compass. When he faces the general direction of the owner, the item will begin to twirl in a slow circle and tug softly, as if it is trying to lead Vito by the hand. This power does not give a precise location, it simply "feels right" when he starts moving toward the owner. If Vito travels following the guiding influence of this power, he will eventually find the object's owner.

The "owner" of an object is defined as the person to whom the object rightfully belongs, rather than to the last person who possessed the object or to anyone only temporarily borrowing or using it.

This is a very rare ability, even among the Vistani, and is physically demanding to perform. Vito can use the ability for no more than six hours at a time. Before using the power again, he must either sleep for one hour, rest for two hours, or spend four hours doing nothing more strenuous than walking.

If he tries to use the power again before resting sufficiently, Vito must make a saving throw vs. paralyzation every turn the power is being used. If he succeeds, he may continue to use the power. If he fails, his eyes roll back in his head and he falls to the ground unconscious. He will not awaken for 5–8 (1d4+4) hours, at which point he may again use the power safely.

Lowellyn Dachine

10th-Level Priest, Neutral Evil

Armor Class	10	Str	9
Movement	12	Dex	10
Level/Hit Dice	10	Con	9
Hit Points	41	Int	17
THAC0	16	Wis	18
No. of Attacks	1	Cha	9
Damage/Attack	1d6+1 (*scythe of withering*)		
Special Attacks	spells		
Special Defenses	spells		
Magic Resistance	10% (*amulet of magic resistance*)		

Lowellyn Dachine is extremely tall and skeletally thin. Although he is 6'6" tall, he weighs just 160 pounds. His chest seems hollow, his ribs can clearly be seen. His jutting cheekbones give his eyes a dark and sunken look. His forehead is high, and is emphasized by his receding hairline.

Lowellyn dresses in robes of ash gray that hang loosely on his emaciated frame. He wears simple cloth slippers that slide over stone floors with a whispering sound, and a round, gray cloth cap. His bony fingers are richly ornamented; each bears a gold or silver ring, many with stones carved with the symbols of the various gods of death.

Background: Although he does not realize it, Lowellyn is the product of one of Azalin's fiendish experiments. Unable to retain new magical knowledge, Azalin sought out a way to store it outside of himself. Using a powerful *wish* spell, he caused a number of women in his domain to become magically impregnated with clones of himself. Many of these children died in the womb and others were born as monstrosities, but a handful survived and proved to be as keen-witted as the ancient, undead wizard himself.

As these children grew to adulthood, Azalin encouraged them to study magic in all of its myriad forms. His plan was to use a *helm of telepathy* to harvest the magical knowledge they had gathered. But once again, his efforts to circumvent Ravenloft's hold upon him were thwarted. He could gain only fleeting glimpses; the hard-won knowledge slipped through his mind like water through a sieve.

The spawn of Azalin, however, have had other uses. Because they are fanatically loyal to the lich lord, Azalin places them in positions of power. One of them, Lowellyn, will test the *Infernal machine*, Azalin's latest attempt to escape the Demiplane of Dread (see the section **The Infernal Machine** on page 33 for details).

Current Sketch: Lowellyn is a rarity in the ranks of the Kargat, Darkon's secret police force. While most of the high-ranking officers are vampires, Lowellyn is a mortal human. And in addition to being a Kargat officer, he is also a priest of the Eternal Order. He thus serves both the state religion and the state's secret police force.

Combat: Lowellyn's most powerful attack is his *poison* spell, which allows him to

poison an opponent with the touch of a hand. Unless the victim makes a successful saving throw vs. poison, he dies in one turn.

Lowellyn also uses a number of reversed curative spells to inflict wounds of varying severity and to render his opponents blind. He prefers, however, to keep opponents at bay using ranged spells such as *command* or *hold person*.

Lowellyn usually lets his minions do his fighting for him, often using the spell *imbue with spell ability* to grant them limited magical powers.

If forced into close combat, Lowellyn uses a modified *barkskin* spell that gives him the tough, leathery skin of a mummy. (This gives him AC 3, instead of the AC 4 usually granted by this spell; the saving throw bonus granted by the spell remains the same.) He fights with his badge of office, a scythe that functions in a manner similar to a *staff of withering*. This +1 magical weapon inflicts 1d6+1 points of damage. It also contains 25 charges, which may be expended at a rate of one per round, each time the weapon strikes. Each time a charge is expended, the victim is either aged 10 years, or suffers an additional 1d4+1 points of damage (the effect is chosen by the wielder of the *scythe of withering*). These effects may be avoided if the victim makes a successful saving throw vs. spell.

Due to his high Wisdom score, Lowellyn has a +4 bonus when making saving throws against illusions and other spells that affect the mind.

Spell List (reversed):

1st—*cause light wounds (cure light wounds), command, curse (bless), darkness (light), detect poison, putrify food and drink (purify food and drink).*

2nd—*barkskin, charm person or mammal, enthrall, hold person, silence 15' radius, speak with animals.*

3rd—*animate dead, cause blindness or deafness (cure blindness or deafness), continual darkness (continual light), speak with dead.*

4th—*animal summoning I, cause serious wounds (cure serious wounds), detect lie, imbue with spell ability, poison (neutralize poison).*

5th—*cause critical wounds (cure critical wounds), raise dead.*

Special Powers: As a priest of Death,

Lowellyn has the ability to inspire *fear* up to two times per day. This ability is similar to the 4th-level wizard spell *fear*.

As an evil priest, Lowellyn also has the ability to command the undead. This ability replaces the usual priest ability of turning undead, and uses the same table to determine effectiveness, found in the *Realm of Terror* sourcebook. Within the Temple of the Eternal Order (which is a sinkhole of evil) Lowellyn gains a +2 bonus to his attempts to control undead.

Magical Items: Lowellyn wears an *amulet of magic resistance* on a chain around his neck. This skull-shaped pendant of polished black obsidian gives him a 10% resistance to spells. This amulet is fragile, however. Should the resistance roll produce a number in the 95–00% range, the amulet shatters and loses its magic.

On his wrist, Lowellyn wears a magical bracelet that is woven from black and white hairs, taken from a hag and drow respectively. This bracelet functions in the same manner as a *rod of absorption*, storing magical energy which Lowellyn can use to cast his spells without the loss of spell memory. He can thus cast spells over and over again without pausing to re-memorize them. One charge is expended for each level of the spell being cast.

This *bracelet of absorption* currently holds 33 spell levels. Lowellyn has already expended 17 spell levels from it, and thus it no longer absorbs spells cast at him.

One of Lowellyn's many rings is set with a "stone" that is actually a concentrated *potion of gaseous form* in pill form. If cornered and with no other means of escape, Lowellyn can bite this pill from the ring and swallow it, transforming to gaseous form for 1d4+4 turns.

Mud Zombie

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Darkon wetlands
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Nil
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Nil
INTELLIGENCE:	Non (0)
TREASURE:	Nil
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral evil
NO. APPEARING:	2d4
ARMOR CLASS:	8
MOVEMENT:	6
HIT DICE:	4
THAC0:	17
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1 or 2
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1d6/1d6 (claw/claw)
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Disease, suffocation
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Immune to thrusting weapons
SPECIAL WEAKNESSES:	Water
MAGICAL RESISTANCE:	Immune to poison and to *charm, hold, sleep,* death magic and mind-controlling spells
SIZE:	M (5-6' tall)
MORALE:	Fearless (20)
XP VALUE:	650

Mud zombies are mindless, animated corpses that consist of a thick layer of slimy mud over a framework of bones. They are the unique creations of Azalin, the lich lord of Darkon, and are typically left lying dormant in the place where they were created. When the appropriate condition arises, they become animated. Typically, the trigger is the passage of intruders through the area, at which point these zombies rise up out of the mud and attack the trespassers.

Mud zombies are made from whole or partial skeletons, usually human. If missing aleg, they crawl toward their victims and have only a single claw attack.

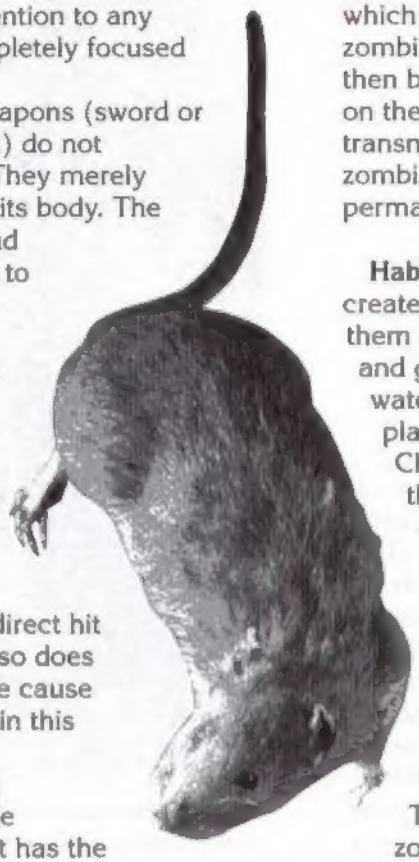
Combat: Mud zombies move slowly, striking last in any combat round. They fight by clawing at their opponents, using the shattered ends of their bones to inflict ragged wounds. Unless treated with curative spells, holy water, or some other recognized sterilizing process, these wounds fester due to the mud that has been smeared into them. The result is a wound that takes twice as long as usual to heal, plus (unless a successful saving throw vs. poison is made) a mild fever that reduces the victim's Strength by 1 point for 1d6 days. This effect is cumulative to a maximum of 4 lost points of Strength.

If a mud zombie strikes with both hands in a single combat round, it clings fast, pressing the victim's face into its muddy chest. On the next round the victim must roll equal to or under his Strength on 1d20 to break free. If the roll fails, the victim suffers 1d4 points of suffocation damage and is still held. One attempt to break free may be made per combat round.

Mud Zombie

Mud zombies are fearless and fight until destroyed. When holding a character, the mud zombie pays no attention to any other attacks and is completely focused on suffocating its victim.

Attacks by piercing weapons (sword or knife thrusts, arrows, etc.) do not damage a mud zombie. They merely pass through the mud of its body. The only way to destroy a mud zombie using weapons is to batter it to pieces.



A mud zombie's one weakness is water, which dissolves the mud that makes up its "flesh." A hard, driving rain will wash away a mud zombie's earthen covering in 3d4 combat rounds. Total immersion in water or a direct hit with holy water (which also does 2d4 damage) will likewise cause the mud to slough away, in this case within 1d4 rounds.

When its mud covering disappears, a mud zombie reverts to skeletal form. It has the same hit points as before, but can no longer hold and suffocate a character. The wounds inflicted by it no longer cause disease.

Other useful tactics to employ against a mud zombie include the spell cone of cold, which will freeze the mud, stopping the zombie in its tracksfor one round. The zombie then breaks free of the frozen mud, emerging on the next round in skeletal form. A reversed transmute rock to mud spell will encase the zombie in a shatter-proof stone skin, permanently immobilizing it.

Habitat/Society: Mud zombies are typically created wherever the raw materials to make them (bones and mud) are found. Battlefields and graveyards situated near a source of water (a river, bog, or lake) are the usual places where they are encountered. Climatic conditions must be just right. If there has been a prolonged drought, the earth will be dry and hard-packed and it will be impossible for a mud zombie to rise from its burial place.

Ecology: Because their flesh has long since rotted away, mud zombies do not have the rotten smell traditionally associated with zombies. The only odor is that of the mud itself. This smell is only noticeable if the zombie has moved away from the muddy field from which it has arisen (which otherwise masks the zombie's smell) and then only at a distance of 20 feet or less.

Temple of the Eternal Order

East Transept

West Transept

A Statuary Alcove
B Bedroom
C Chapel
D Private Bedroom
E Treasury
F Prayer Room
G Scriptorium
H Bishop's Chamber
I Vestry
J Inner Sanctum
K Rear Nave
L Nave
WC Washroom

Door
Locked Door
Barred Door
Archway
Double Doors
Secret Door
Stained Glass Window
Stained Glass Window (broken)
Statue
Font
Altar
Sepulcher
Shelf
Pillar
Table
Wooden Screen
Bed
Candelabra
Chair
Domed Ceiling

Scale: 1 square = 5 feet

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Game Adventure

Death Ascendant

by Lisa Smedman

SCANNED BY: JACK D. KNIGHT

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The remnants of the Ebon Fold are cutting a deadly path through the Falkovian countryside, draining travelers of their life force and leaving withered corpses in their wake. Hot on their trail, you come across the sole survivor of one of these deadly attacks, a young vistani man with an extraordinary skill for fortune-telling. His *tarokka* deck helps close the gap between you and the assassins. Together you follow the trail through Darkon, the dark domain of the lich lord Azalin, to the city of Nartok.

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For three to six characters of levels 6—8

ISBN 0-7869-0414-3

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U.S. $12.95 CAN $16.95 U.K. £7.99

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